EDITED BY

SUSANNE

SCHOLZ

The Oxford Handbook *of* FEMINIST APPROACHES TO THE HEBREW BIBLE

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In Memory of Judith E. McKinlay (1938–2019), feminist scholar, colleague, mentor, and teacher to many and whose last piece of writing appears in this book.

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I also thank my contributors who worked hard and long on researching and writing their essays. We went through thick and thin with many of the essays, and I am grateful that you allowed me to be part of your writing process. It is an honor to see colleagues at work and to converse with each other on improving, changing, and expanding this or that aspect of the various essays. Thank you for being consistent and prompt in your responses. Thank you for your cooperation when reviews came back with additional modifications. I also thank especially the early contributors for their patience while I was herding delayed contributors like cats! It is definitely a time-consuming challenge to get thirty-seven essays published in a single volume. Finally, it is finished.

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The final word of posthumous gratitude goes to our colleague, Judith McKinlay, who contributed her last piece of scholarly writing to this volume. She emailed me on November 2, 2018, asking me about the progress of this volume and telling me of her grave illness. I responded that the Handbook was not yet completed and thanked her for her scholarly contributions to the feminist study of the Bible. On February 9, 2019, Sarah Mitchell emailed stating:

> It is with much sadness I write to you, as scholar-colleagues of Judith, to let you know of her death yesterday. Although I have not met all of you, I walked alongside Judith in her developing academic career and feel I know you all. Your encouragement and admiration of Judith's biblical and postcolonial research and writing has brought much joy to me—as it did, of course, to her too. Sadly, her work was not as appreciated nor understood very much in Aotearoa-New Zealand and her international experiences offered her the opportunities she needed to explore fully the academic biblical critical world. I do not have to tell you what a creative writer and thinker she was . . . or what a delightful person she was. For me, she was my closest friend . . . more a sister than anything else. Her experiences with all of you were highly significant for her and I know she will have expressed her gratitude to you all. I thank you for your involvement in her life.

This Handbook on feminist approaches to the Hebrew Bible is dedicated to Judith as a token of our deepest appreciation for her scholarly contributions to the field of biblical studies. Book projects, especially comprehensive ones like this one, take years to complete. In the meantime life and death happen. I am grateful and proud to offer this volume to the scholarly community interested in the feminist study of the Hebrew Bible. May our scholarly efforts and insights contribute to the healing of this world.

Susanne Scholz
Dallas, Texas, U.S.A.
May 31, 2019

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Reading the Hebrew Bible with Feminist Eyes: Introduction

Susanne Scholz

The scholarly accomplishments, exegetical innovations, and methodological insights of feminist biblical studies speak for themselves. Yet some sectors of biblical studies and the vast public know almost nothing about these scholarly developments that began in the 1970s. The hegemonic ignorance about feminist biblical studies, however, is not accidental but willfully perpetrated by generation after generation of biblical exegetes. They recognize that patriarchal privilege continues only when kyriarchal theories and practices are continuously proclaimed even if it requires the active exclusion of exegetical, hermeneutical, and methodological excellence. Phallogocentric interpreters do not voluntarily relinquish scholarly, religious, or institutional privileges. At stake is power.

Unsurprisingly, then, feminist biblical studies—even after almost fifty years of ongoing scholarly exegesis of the Bible with variously defined feminist, womanist, gendered, and queer hermeneutical stances and articulated within variously developed intersectional manifestations—are still not fully integrated into the academic disciplines of biblical, theological, and religious studies. A brief look at conventional introductory textbooks on the Bible, Old Testament, Hebrew Bible, or New Testament proves this point. Targeting undergraduate and graduate students, most of these books exclude systematic references to feminist biblical exegesis. At the level of religious institutions, such as synagogues or churches, in which the Bible plays a central role as a sacred text, feminist interpretations are also not part and parcel of learning, teaching, and preaching. To this very day, Abraham and Moses, Joshua and David, or Jeremiah and Ezekiel receive primary attention but not Sarah, Hagar, and Miriam, Deborah and Ruth, or the wise women of Endor and Huldah. Patriarchal assumptions

uphold sexist, homophobic, and heteronormative beliefs about women, men, and anybody beyond the gender binary. It is crucial that feminist Bible scholars, within their various intersectional locations, keep researching, writing, and publishing scholarly works so that the exegetical record is available to everybody who wants to know more about feminist scholarship on the Bible.

This Oxford Handbook contributes to this effort. It aims to offer scholarly inspiration, exegetical horizons, and hermeneutical ideas for future explorations in the field of feminist biblical studies. It stands in excellent company with other feminist, womanist, and queer works published during the past five decades.[1] Thus, the volume does not claim singularity. Rather, like other comprehensively designed anthologies,[2] it illustrates the breadth and depth of feminist scholarship on the Old Testament. Four main areas organize the current exegetical, hermeneutical, and methodological discourses pursued in feminist Hebrew Bible studies. They relate to globalization, neoliberalism, (digital) media cultures, and various intersectional articulations.

Although this anthology offers an impressively diverse lineup, no anthology can exhaustively cover the entirety of the field. On top of this expected limitation, several contributors jumped ship for all kinds of reasons, despite initial invitations and commitments. While extensive, the volume thus offers only a sampling of what is available in feminist biblical exegesis today. Still, thirty-seven essays await interested readers. The central and guiding principle for commissioning the essays was grounded in the goal to produce a book that will guide feminist biblical research into an exciting scholarly future. Detailed surveys or diligent summaries of past accomplishments were outside the scope of the assignment. In fact, my three anthologies, entitled *Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Retrospect*, Vol. 1: *Biblical Books*; Vol. 2: *Social Location*; Vol. 3: *Methods*, collect, describe, and assess past and present accomplishments and directions in feminist biblical scholarship.[3]

The present book serves as an unofficial fourth volume to the three previous volumes, offering ideas, suggestions, and positions about the current development of feminist Old Testament studies. The four categories of globalization, neoliberalism, (digital) media cultures, and intersectionality constitute the intellectual arenas in which contemporary feminist scholars have creatively and productively examined biblical texts, biblical interpretation histories, and biblical discourses in recent years. Admittedly, other organizing categories exist, not least the conventional text-fetishized system, still dominating the academic field of the Bible, that categorizes the study of the Bible according to its books. Old-fashioned and predictable approaches,

however, seem too narrow to offer a vibrant future for feminist biblical exegesis in a world that questions, if not outright rejects, the merits of biblical studies as an academic field. This is a time of dramatic change, and so this collection of essays aims to contribute to exegetical, hermeneutical, and methodological "innovation" and "excellence" of feminist biblical studies.[4]

While biblical texts, topics, and issues remain central concerns in all of the thirty-seven essays, each contribution moves beyond past accomplishments. Without aiming to supersede them, each essay invites readers to think anew about the purpose of biblical interpretation, the viability of feminist, womanist, gendered, and queer concerns for the reading of biblical texts, and the relations of both purpose and viability of the Bible in a world in which millions of people read its texts daily. I for one would love to come back in 150 years to discover if this Handbook has encouraged, inspired, and supported future Bible scholars to go boldly into exegetical, hermeneutical, and methodological directions as suggested by this or that essay. This kind of impact would be my sincere wish although our era does not give much reason to be optimistic about the future of planet Earth.

The Historical Journey of Feminist Hebrew Bible Studies

Feminist Bible scholarship has come a long way. It started with exegetical works on "women" of the Bible, but the field has moved beyond essentializing and naturalizing gender discourse. Intersectional considerations about gender in light of race, class, geopolitics, or even age characterize feminist biblical scholarship as exegetes examine the cultural, political, and explicitly religious positions in relation to biblical texts, characters, or topics. Yet the essentializing and naturalizing category of woman was the foundation for feminist interpretation in the 1970s, leading to significant scholarly fruits in the 1980s and 1990s. Without the groundbreaking focus on women as a succinct political category, feminist biblical studies would probably not have come into existence.

The arrival of postmodern feminist theories in the 1990s expanded the essentializing and naturalizing dynamics of the category of woman to include gender, queer, masculinity, and sexuality as intersectional categories. This development enabled feminist biblical exegetes to theorize the socio-political, economic, cultural, and religious dynamics that are involved when we examine

the Bible and its interpretation histories. Queer scholarship, in particular, has ensured that assumptions about the gender binary of female and male are recognized as heteronormative constructs that stabilize, essentialize, and thus limit the analysis of gender in problematic ways. Today, mostly religiously conservative scholars still look for women in the Bible, ignoring the theoretical insights about the study of gender, queer, masculinity, or sexuality studies.

Yet it must be acknowledged that without *women* scholars the field of feminist biblical studies would not have come into existence. It required academically credentialed and exegetically committed feminists of the 1970s to take seriously the androcentric, patriarchal, and heteronormative structures of oppression dominating their religious traditions and the academic study of the Bible. Prior to the ground-breaking feminist biblical scholarship of the 1970s only some relatively isolated and largely forgotten women writers and political activists for women's suffrage and the abolition of slavery argued for women's civil and political rights. Depending on the century in which they lived, they hailed from the local aristocracy or from religious orders during the European Middle Ages, or they were faithful lay members of Christian or Jewish traditions in the sixteenth century. A considerable number of them worked for the abolition of slavery and women's suffrage in the nineteenth century. Several of them argued like second-wave feminists although the latter knew little about them in the 1960s and the 1970s. Most of the writings did not make it into the elite, white, male, Western, European, and Christian-secularized scholarship of the Bible. The early works were thus largely ignored and forgotten for centuries until contemporary feminist research brought them back to light.

Luckily, some literary records of women reading the Bible in favor of women's equality and civil rights survived since the European Middle Ages. One of the medieval writers is the Italian writer, Christine de Pizan (1364–1430), who published in French. She was a prolific author who wrote poetry and prose. In her work, *Le Livre de la* Cité des Dames (1405; *The Book of the City of Ladies*), she elaborated on heroic and virtuous women. She also defended women's equality on the basis of her reading of Genesis 1–3, maintaining that woman, like man, was not only created in God's image but also made of much better material than man. Woman was taken from human flesh whereas man was only made from soil. Moreover, de Pizan observed that the location of woman's creation was better than man's. Eve was created in paradise, and so her noble nature was guaranteed by God. To de Pizan, woman was God's masterpiece, the culmination of Creation.[5]

Later women writers also highlighted biblical women's accomplishments to

argue for women's equality in society. For instance, Argula von Grumback (1492–1554?) and Marie Dentièr (1495–1561) mention Deborah of Judges 4–5 as a powerful biblical figure who demonstrates that women ought to have a public voice and public capabilities.[6] In fact, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, European women published their views about biblical women in unprecedented numbers. They challenged conventional readings of female characters, their intellect, and their roles. The biblical woman Deborah inspired many of them to repel misogynistic attacks and to fight off their opponents to women's equality.[7] The nineteenth century saw a meteoric rise of women's voices, particularly among politically engaged U.S. Christian leaders, such as Sarah Moore Grimké (1792–1873), Sojourner Truth (1797–1883), Angelina Grimké Weld (1805–79), Phoebe Palmer (1807–74), Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–96), or Grace Aguilar (1816–47).[8]

Perhaps the most well-known nineteenth-century woman interpreter is the renowned U.S.-American suffragist and abolitionist, Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902). Stanton gathered a team of like-minded white women to interpret the Bible against the status quo of patriarchal order and social hierarchies. She considered the Bible as the original cause of women's oppression and was convinced that only a systematic study of oppressive biblical passages would dismantle sexist forces in society and lead to women's equality. Stanton wanted to dispel women's attraction to religion by showing religion's deep complicity with androcentric, patriarchal domination. Her landmark anthology, *The Woman's Bible* (1895 and 1898), exposed the negative influence of the Bible on women's status throughout Western history. Stanton believed that "[s]o long as tens of thousands of Bibles are printed every year, and circulated over the whole habitable globe, and the masses in all English-speaking nations revere it as the word of God, it is vain to belittle its influence."[9] To be sure, Stanton's vision was impaired with respect to race, class, and anti-Judaism; here she wore the same biased lenses as her male contemporaries. Yet for the time in which she lived, Stanton was a courageous visionary in her insistence that the Bible itself must be understood as an androcentric product, and women's social and political equality could not be achieved without confronting the patriarchal nature of the scriptures.

Stanton was profoundly frustrated with organized religion and not afraid to say so. For instance, she told a collaborator of *The Woman's Bible*: "If we who do see the absurdities of old superstitions never unveil them to others, how is the world to make any progress in the theologies? I am in the sunset of life, and I feel it to be my special mission to tell people what they are not prepared to hear,

instead of echoing worn-out opinions."[10] Repeatedly she pointed to the equal gender qualities of God when she discussed the second creation account with an emphasis on Gen. 2:21–25. As many feminist interpreters before and after her, she praised the first creation account in Genesis 1 because it "dignifies woman as an important factor in the creation, equal in power and glory with man" whereas [t]he second makes her a mere afterthought."[11] It was clear to Stanton that "some wily writer, seeing the perfect equality of man and woman in the first chapter, felt it important for the dignity and dominion of man to effect woman's subordination in some way."[12] The bias of the biblical writer and no divinely ordained order, she argued, led to woman's secondary status in this creation account. As a result, Genesis 1 was Stanton's preferred narrative, and in typical Christian fashion Stanton referred to Gal. 3:28 to underline the validity of Genesis 1. She also used the biblical passages to criticize church policy: "With this recognition of the feminine element in the Godhead in the Old Testament, and this declaration of the equality of the sexes in the News, we may well wonder at the contemptible status woman occupies in the Christian church to-day."[13] What emerges from Stanton's comments in *The Women's Bible* is a strong commitment to interpret the Bible as an androcentric product, which has to be demolished and left behind in order to free women from male domination.

After women in Western countries gained the right to vote shortly after the First World War, a period of slow, if not stalled, progress for women's rights began.[14] It lasted until the late 1960s when the Women's Liberation Movement emerged. During these decades many of the arguments and accomplishments of the suffragettes were quickly forgotten. Few women were admitted to the ranks of academia and even less made it as biblical scholars, and those who did worked in isolation enjoying little academic support and collegiality. Some managed to publish treatises on women and the Hebrew Bible, but these works did not share the intellectual fervor and political zeal of de Pizan or Stanton. The later studies signaled religious-conservative convictions as they attempted to establish investigations on biblical women as legitimate historical-literary or spiritual pursuits. They did not engage the Bible as a text with contemporary socio-political significance for women's equality and civil rights.

Yet all of the writings indicate that women have always actively and independently read the Bible. It is true that many of them were the recipients of biblical meanings as handed down and interpreted by androcentric religious institutions. It was also often dangerous for women to speak publicly in front of women and men. Yet alongside this baleful tradition was an alternative experience: again and again, women of high intellect, great independence, and

strong conviction challenged male political and religious leaders to accept women's equality with men not only before God but also in society. By raising their voices, women who often came from religious orders or the upper classes tried to defeat with their words entrenched structures of sexism, misogyny, and patriarchy. Sometimes, especially when they came from the underprivileged strata of society, their lone voices connected the discrimination of women to other structures of domination, including racism or classism, demanding to abolish all of them. Thus, the existing historical documents of pre-twentieth-century women interpreting the Bible illustrate that Bible-reading women did not always submit to kyriarchal, androcentric, and patriarchal thought and practice. They managed to think for themselves, to raise pertinent questions related to gender oppression in their societies, and to envision gender justice as a way of life. That we do not currently know the works of non-Western women reading the Bible indicates the limitations of the chronological and geopolitical record available in the Western, European, and Christian centric interpretation histories of the Bible.

The dearth of feminist Bible interpretations changed when academically credentialed feminist Bible scholars began publishing their research in academic journals and by academic publishing houses since the 1970s. In alignment with the Women's Liberation Movement, feminist Bible scholars classified their works as feminist and later also as womanist, a term increasingly used by African American women scholars.[15] Especially since the 1990s, but already earlier, feminist Bible research often intersected with other socio-political categories, such as race, class, sexuality, religious tradition, disability, or geopolitics.[16] As the United States was the hegemonic-imperial nation by the 1970s and English had become the lingua franca in the world, U.S.-American scholars came to dominate feminist biblical exegesis. The existing scholarly infrastructures of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) and the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) provided feminist scholars in religious, theological, and biblical studies with regular networking opportunities that other countries lacked. The annual conferences of the AAR and SBL that currently draw about ten thousand attendees have ensured that feminist scholars and activists from the North American continent and increasingly also from around the globe meet regularly since the 1970s. The Jewish feminist scholar and past president of the AAR, Judith Plaskow, remembers these developments when she writes:

> The 1970s was a pivotal decade. … The women who gathered in Atlanta at the joint meeting of the American Academy of Religion and Society of Biblical Literature in November of 1971 founded both a caucus to take up political and professional issues of concern to women in the academy and

> a program unit—the Working Group on Women and Religion—to share emerging research. … In 1975, the opening panel of the new Women and Religion section showcased the methodologies that had emerged in four years of work and called for a paradigm shift from the androcentric model of humanity in which only men represent the human to a model in which women and men "are coequally modes of the human, and, therefore, coequally subjects of … research."[17]

Other conferences and workshops were also part of the rise of feminist studies in religion, theology, and biblical studies.

The pioneering phase was as exhilarating as it was scary. Everything had to be invented because feminist Bible scholars did not know anything about the work accomplished by their proto-feminist foremothers. The exposure of patriarchy and sexism was revolutionary, and Mary Daly's call to say "'No' to [current] values, norms and structures of the church" gave courage and confidence to many other religious feminists and secular feminists interested in religion.[18] Plaskow confirms the significance of the 1970s for the development of feminist biblical studies when she comments on this early phase in feminist biblical studies:

> [T]he 1970s saw the emergence of feminist work on the Bible that was explicitly grounded in and supportive of the revolution in women's self-understandings and social roles. As feminists brought new questions to biblical texts, they began both to uncover the lineaments of women's "herstory" buried within androcentric frameworks and to develop exegetical and hermeneutical tools for understanding and evaluating the significance of biblical perspectives on women. The foundations were laid for the flowering of feminist biblical scholarship in the 1980s and 1990s that would see the entry of women of color, out lesbians, and Jewish women into an increasingly rich and multifaceted conversation.[19]

These feminist Bible scholars, like feminist religion scholars in general, committed themselves to feminist work in their fields. They ignored the warning voices of second-wave feminists who advised "to give the whole thing [religion] up as a bad job, a dead horse which it is pointless to flog any further."[20] Instead, they have resisted, dismantled, opposed, reconstructed, and reinterpreted biblical texts, concepts, and assumptions as deeply linked to past and present sexism, misogyny, androcentrism, and heteronormativity in their various intersectional manifestations.[21]

Current Challenges to Feminist Hebrew Bible Studies

After five decades of developing feminist Hebrew Bible scholarship, it should not be surprising that feminist Bible scholars wonder about the next step. After almost every biblical woman character has been identified, every scholarly method applied, and practically every biblical text analyzed for its gender ideology,[22] the question is, what remains to be done if we do not want to merely give in to the neoliberal status quo? Perhaps this is one of the reasons why feminist biblical scholars are currently in the process of surveying and assessing the field. For instance, Athalya Brenner poses the following questions when she reflects on the future of the field:

> *Quo vadis*, feminist biblical scholarship? . . . What is beckoning? Where do you want to go? Is the Master's House still the house you long to possess, only that you would like to become its legitimate(d) masters and mistresses instead of marginal(ized) lodgers? Would you like to move it (houses can be moved now from one location to another)? . . . Will an act of exchanging places within the accepted power paradigms be the object of desire? Are new structures of dominance, a shift in majority/minority balances, being implemented? Are you, we, aspiring to conquistador positions in the names of the proverbial "oppressed"? Should we not simply demolish the house instead of merely deconstructing it and its inhabitants, in order to build a completely new one instead? And if so, who will get right of occupation in the new house, and on what terms? . . . The contenders are many and the audiences are dwindling, as we are becoming more and more radicalized. Whose scholarship will matter, say, twenty-five years hence?[23]

Brenner wonders about the existing power hierarchies, as feminist Bible scholars adapt to the status quo or change it. It is a reflection on the in-house situation of feminist Bible studies in the early part of the twenty-first century.

Yet Brenner's concerns do not address the larger intellectual and societal developments, in contrast to Pamela Milne, who considers the political and social implications of biblical exegesis for women in the past and the present. As she observes an increasing professionalization and depoliticization of feminist Bible work since the 1970s, she worries about feminist interpreters being co-opted into supporting the status quo.[24] Others, such as Deryn Guest, recommend that feminist biblical scholarship "tool up and become even more expansively theory-rich, able to bring the critical studies of masculinities, queer studies, trans studies, intersex studies, and lesbian and gay studies into negotiation with feminist theory without necessarily privileging what have been, to date, stalwart feminist positions."[25] Still others observe that feminist biblical exegetes need to be committed to intersectional hermeneutics and take seriously connections to racism, classism, homophobia, disability, or geopolitics.[26]

It also seems clear that in the early decades of the second millennium CE, North American feminist biblical research is dealing with several new challenges. One challenge is related to the function of feminist biblical

scholarship within the institutional framework of higher education. Another challenge comes from the Christian Right, which has taken on the issue of women and gender in numerous publications widely distributed to lay audiences. Yet another challenge—probably the most intellectually productive—pushes feminist studies toward investigations of "otherness" of all sorts, such as queer, ethnicity and race, and postcolonial studies.

First, North American feminist biblical scholarship has primarily developed within institutions of higher education and has become part of undergraduate and graduate departments of religious and theological studies and seminaries. This development means that feminist biblical scholars have not only to earn the usual academic credentials and to comply with established standards of tenure and promotion, but they also have to adapt to the dominant academic discourses and scholarly norms in their teaching and research. Esther Fuchs elaborates on the implications of these dynamics for feminist biblical work within the discipline of biblical studies when she writes:

> Though feminist scholarship has decidedly made serious inroads into biblical studies, the academic process of evaluation that decides who receives a grant and who gets published and where is still largely in male hands. Feminist students must get the approval of malestream professors, and even feminist professors continue to depend on malestream colleagues and administrators for approval and advancement. That male scholars continue to control the means of production of feminist knowledge means that this knowledge has been interpreted largely as yet another ingredient to be added to and stirred into the pot of biblical studies. The current co-optation of feminist studies makes it impossible to use it as a means of transforming the entire field of biblical studies into an ethically committed and institutionally independent field that values both social action and scholarship.[27]

Scholars of the dominant status quo evaluate publications, grants, and the development of feminist knowledge. The feminist call to action—one of the initial drives of feminist scholarship in the 1970s—has all too often become secondary, and the impetus towards sociopolitical, economic, and cultural transformation is neglected. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, feminist biblical research has turned into increasingly specialized, depoliticized, and co-opted projects that comply with dominant standards, norms, and expectations. As Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner observe, the guild of biblical studies "maintains a strong line of male-identified scholarly assessment and production"[28] and "the difference that is tolerated does not challenge the phallocentric and colonial structures of the guild" but rather contributes to "solidify its hold."[29] Feminist biblical scholarship, like other marginalized discourses by the "excluded other," functions as a "fetish" and "is granted access to the formal structure as a beneficent gesture."[30]

As a result, in North American institutions of higher education, feminist biblical research often serves as an add-on to the existing academic content management and distribution systems. Feminist biblical scholars must adapt to dominant academic expectations, the evaluation procedures of publishers, and the waning feminist sensibilities of their students. Moreover, as Milne notes, the emergence of feminist biblical studies and the inclusion of "others" into the field of biblical studies have concurrently led to "the devaluing of the field that we can now observe at many institutions."[31] She insists that this development "may well be linked to the fact that what was once a virtually all-male discipline is no longer so."[32] Hector Avalos goes even further. He states that "the SBL is the agent of a dying profession" because it lacks teaching positions at credible academic institutions.[33] In this situation of gradually disappearing teaching positions, the "long-term viability" of feminist biblical scholarship is at stake, because innovation is "endangered or at least impeded."[34] Because of the survival mode in the humanities, the impetus toward maintaining the status quo discourages bold proposals for epistemological and hermeneutical change, including those from feminist biblical scholars.[35] At their best, then, feminist biblical scholars contribute to developing, promoting, and cultivating textual interpretations as "site[s] of struggle"[36] focused on issues that are "our own in this present world."[37] In other words, the ongoing marginalization of feminist biblical work in institutions of higher education has dampened the powerful energies that were set free in the 1970s.

Second, the Christian Right and its plethora of publications on women, gender, and the Bible present another considerable challenge to North American feminist biblical studies, although it remains largely unacknowledged on either side. Beginning in the 1990s and then forcefully propelled into the public during the new millennium, proponents of conservative-fundamentalist Christianity have published many books and anthologies on gender and the Bible. Defining themselves as complementarians, they have taken on writers and theologians within their own religious context, contesting egalitarian positions about women and men in church and society. The mostly male and white authors are often powerful leaders in evangelical organizations, particularly the Council of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood.[38]

What is striking about the complementarian Christian Right's discourse on gender and the Bible is its disregard for feminist biblical scholarship as it has emerged in academic discourse since the 1970s. Although many complementarian authors are seminary professors, such as John Piper and Wayne

A. Grudem, their books do not engage academic feminist and nonfeminist biblical scholarship even when they discuss biblical passages, such as Gen. 1–3, Eph. 5:21–33, Col. 3:18–19, or 1 Tim. 2:11–15.

As a result of the Christian Right's conservative sociopolitical and theological discourse, feminist exegetes continue combating the most basic and persistent androcentric views on women, gender, and the Bible that they have been deconstructing for decades. The emergence of evangelical publications, such as *The IVP Women's Bible Commentary*, edited by Catherine Clark Kroeger and Mary J. Evans,[39] contributes to the confusion about the nature, goals, and positions of feminist biblical scholarship. Many lay readers do not distinguish between a women's commentary emerging from an evangelical-theological context and feminist biblical books published within the academic field of biblical studies and descending from the feminist movement of the 1970s. Thus, evangelical-conservative books on women, gender, and the Bible remain within the boundaries of a socio-theologically conservative hermeneutics.[40]

Third, investigations on "otherness" related to queer studies, ethnicity and race, and postcolonialism also challenge early feminist academic discourse on the Bible, but these studies also constitutes an intellectually very productive turn for feminist biblical research. Publications such as the *Queer Bible Commentary* and other anthologies and monographs on queer biblical interpretations[41] have urged feminist biblical scholars to open up to LGBTQI issues. For instance, Guest observes the prevalence of a "heteropatriarchal framework" in feminist biblical studies that sheds light on women in the Bible but does not explicitly consider lesbian hermeneutical concerns. She writes:

> Feminists and womanists have done sterling work; shedding light on the role and status of scriptural women, asking new questions, modifying and challenging existing methodologies, raising issues not traditionally incorporated within historical critical exegesis. However, almost the entirety of this work has taken place within a heterocentric frame of reference; one that assumes the heterosexuality of the scriptural women themselves; one that appears to presuppose a heterosexual academic community, since lesbian-related concerns and issues have hardly been given a sentence until very recently. … Yet, for all this good work, the framework of enquiry has remained predominantly heterocentric.[42]

Guest grants a few exceptions in feminist biblical studies,[43] but overall she charges that female homoeroticism has been pushed into a space of "invisibility" due to the dominant "heteropatriarchal framework"[44] of academia and society. Also Ken Stone encourages connections between feminist and queer biblical studies because "feminism, too, is devoted to the critical analysis of sex and gender."[45] To him, a critical gender analysis should not be limited to "biblical

representations of women" but extend "to biblical representations of men and of 'masculinity.'"[46] In a way, then, queer biblical scholarship advances the work in feminist biblical studies as it "problematize[s] normative approaches to sexuality" and deconstructs "such dichotomies as 'homosexual/heterosexual' and 'male/female.'"[47] In short, LGBTQI exegesis aims to disrupt "sex-gender-sexuality norms and academic conventions, playful and at times purposefully irreverent"[48] and to expand feminist research beyond the analysis of "woman" or "women."

Similarly, the emergence of studies on race and ethnicity has opened up feminist exegesis to perspectives from Asian American feminists and feminist scholars from minoritized North American communities.[49] Key in such explorations has been the hermeneutical insight that flesh-and-blood readers are central to the exegetical task of contextualizing biblical meanings in today's world.[50] Combined with postcolonial sensibilities, Mai-Anh Le Tran presents Lot's wife, Ruth, and the Vietnamese figure Tô Thị as female characters "that liberate rather than dominate."[51] Also Gale A. Yee problematizes the methodological, hermeneutical, and political soundness of ethnic/racial identity of biblical readers. She wonders what defines "my Asian Americanness, and how does this identity affect my biblical interpretation?"[52] In addition, postcolonial feminist studies on the Bible have emerged not only from North America but from other contexts as well.[53] In sum, a current goal of feminist biblical studies is to bring feminist scholars of different social locations and hermeneutical and methodological assumptions together to find common ground in the academic study of biblical literature, history, and tradition.[54] In light of the institutional challenges, the Christian Right's insistence on essentialized views on the gender binary, and the push toward investigations of "otherness," dialogical conversations, and collaborations among feminist Bible scholars are sorely needed.

Central Issues for Feminist Hebrew Bible Studies

The challenges have also forced feminist Hebrew Bible researchers to deliberate on how not to get bogged down in conventionally defined scholarly conversations and disputes in biblical studies. It does not suffice to adapt into the

existing scholarly framework divorced from contemporary debates, struggles, and issues in the world, and thereby to contribute to the perpetuation of structures of domination, such as colonialism, racism, ethnonationalism, ageism, anti-ecology, or able-bodied rhetoric. A prominent issue for feminist deliberations is the question about reading the Bible without merely rehashing text-fetishized ways of interpretation. Obviously, the field, as it has emerged during the past five decades, is not a monolithic area of scholarship. Researchers do not proceed in lockstep relying on uniform epistemic parameters, hermeneutical certitudes, or exegetical approaches. The field is diverse, multivocal, and pluriverse with many different research agendas, publications, and teachings offered to variously located, religiously oriented, or secularized audiences interested in the academic study of the Bible.

This anthology features four broadly defined conceptual frameworks to organize the current state of feminist Hebrew Bible scholarship. The fourfold framework of globalization, neoliberalism, (digital) media cultures, and intersectionality aims to move away from what Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza classifies as the antiquarian-historical, modernist epistemic paradigm.[55] She urges feminist Bible scholars to participate in the necessary "double paradigm shift in the ethos of biblical studies."[56] This paradigm shift moves from "a positivist scientist, allegedly interest-free and value-neutral objectivist ethos of scholarship to a scientific feminist one on the one hand," as it also moves from "an androcentric or better kyriocentric linguistically based cultural ethos to a critical feminist one on the other hand."[57] This reconceptualization of biblical studies as *feminist* biblical studies needs to take place so that the field will be equipped to handle the challenges of globalization, neoliberalism, (digital) media cultures, and intersectionality. By leaving the dominant positivist-scientific discourse behind, feminist biblical scholars will become equipped to counteract objectivist, disinterested, and purely technical research claimed to be based on quantitative methods or "data." Schüssler Fiorenza proposes that "critical global feminist CT [Christian Testament] studies have to critically investigate the theoretical frameworks and scientific methods that we adopt from malestream biblical studies."[58] What she applies to "Christian Testament" studies surely applies to the Hebrew Bible, too. She also maintains that feminist Bible scholars "not only . . . scrutinize traditional methods and their frameworks as to their emancipatory or concealing functions but also articulate feminist critical approaches and methods."[59] She suggests to conceptualize "biblical studies as a rhetoric and ethics of inquiry and transformation," which she classifies as "the emancipatory paradigm of biblical studies."[60] The fourfold framework of this

anthology aims to implement her feminist-hermeneutical vision.

Globalization

The first part of the fourfold framework concentrates on the concept of globalization, certainly "a term that has, at best, a politically ambivalent charge."[61] The issue of globalization has become prominent in religious, theological, and biblical studies since the 1990s when politicians in Western countries began implementing economic policies that have expanded the manufacturing, financial, and technological industries far beyond Western countries to countries around the globe. The economist, Costas Lapavitsas, defines globalization as it has emerged since the 1990s as referring to "the growth of the world market, the expansion of international financial markets, the increasing interpenetration of economies via foreign direct investment, the rise of global flows of lending, and a host of related phenomena in the world market during the last three decades."[62] By now, a general discontent with globalization has set in, as the economist, Joseph E. Stiglitz, observes. He asserts that "[t]he discontent with globalization arises not just from economics seeming to be pushed over everything else, but because a particular view of economics—market fundamentalism—is pushed over all other views."[63] What we need, therefore, are "global public institution to help set the rules" according to local, regional, national, and global circumstances.[64]

The globalized outlook began to become part of biblical studies since the mid-1990s. Biblical scholars, Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, brought it prominently to the attention of biblical exegesis when they published their two-volume work, *Reading from This Place*.[65] They explain that the globalized perspective is needed in biblical studies because we are working in "a radically changing world within biblical criticism—a world of increasing and irreversible diversity and pluralism, the world of the twenty-first century."[66] The significance of opening up biblical scholarship to a globalized hermeneutics has become established as part of the academic study of the Bible when the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) began publishing monographs and anthologies in a new series called "International Voices in Biblical Studies."[67] The series aims "to stimulate reflection on biblical hermeneutics on a global scale."[68] The growing number of books published in the series illustrate the diversity and range of approaches and views about globalization articulated within the

globalized communities of biblical scholars. The focus on globalized locations of biblical research has thus proven to be a productive starting point within the field, including in feminist biblical studies.

Here is where Vincent L. Wimbush's pertinent objection to the mere assimilation into the existing scholarly status quo comes to mind, as he asks: "Why should the Bible, that master narrative text of Western culture, the text that has figured so prominently in providing ideological justification for the wresting of the land called new from native peoples, in providing warrants for securing it and building it up on the backs of the forced labor of Africans—how should we think about the Bible, and about continuing relationships with it? What might we do about the Europeanization of the Bible? And what about the overdetermined European-white North Americanist interpretive agenda and approaches in relationship to it?"[69] He has an answer to his questions that goes like this:

> To be fully human is to interpret. To interpret is to seek meaning. The truly free individual is the one who seeks meaning through radical readings—open-ended readings about the self in the world, necessarily including the past, readings that represent openness to other ways of knowing, readings that expand the boundaries and genres of scripturalizing.[70]

The search is for meaning as found in readings, including biblical readings, from around the world. Such readings cannot be divorced from their social locations and contexts, and they must be freed from enslaved master narratives, hermeneutical scientism, and methodological restrictions, according to Wimbush. Thus, globalization ought not to be reduced to economics or politics, but, as some Nigerian scholars explain, the definition of globalization ought to underscore the notion of global "interdependence" and "international solidarity."[71] Practiced in the context of globalization, (feminist) biblical interpretation would then be "holistic, tolerant, accommodating, and . . . [offer] a congenial forum for the participation of both the developed and developing worlds."[72] Gold Okwuolise Anie explains further:

> It must be a globalization that democratizes its ideas and power; a globalization where no man [*sic*] is oppressed; no continent marginalized; no country trivialized and no theologian and Biblicist denied a pride of place in the ongoing theological evolution in Africa. This can only be made possible where there is "a dialectical interaction process in all aspects of human life involving all sectors of the globe" in Biblical Hermeneutics.[73]

What is true for Africa ought also to be true for America, Asia, Australia, and Europe. Roland Boer and Fernando F. Segovia argue that much when they state: "Since the late 1980s a good deal has changed, not least of which is the

breakdown in the North Atlantic dominance of biblical scholarship or the severe downturn of those economies since 2008 and the seismic economic shift to Asia. Voices from the majority of the globe have begun and continue to speak in ways that are reshaping biblical studies. . . .”[74] In our current era of “dense systems of communication,”[75] then, the conceptual category of globalization offers considerable opportunities for feminist Hebrew Bible studies. In other words, the framework of globalization does not emphasize the world of money, economics, and finance as much as the global infrastructures of communication and connections among the vast numbers of Bible readers living around the world. The ten essays in the section entitled “The Impact of Globalization on Feminist Biblical Studies” elaborate on those opportunities within various contexts and in various ways.

Neoliberalism

The second part of the fourfold framework concentrates on the concept of neoliberalism. This notion permeates contemporary intellectual discourse since 2008 although political, economic, and social policies, grounded in neoliberal convictions, have been implemented at least since the Reagan-Thatcher era of the early 1980s. According to Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin, the neoliberal ideology emerged already in continuity to the post-war era. The early to mid-twentieth-century economists, Ludwig on Mises and Friedrich Hayek, coined the term, although neoliberalist policies only took hold when Keynesian policies fell apart in the 1970s. After the election of the US-president, Ronald Reagan, and the British prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, in the 1980s, neoliberal ideology became part of everyday life. It brought “massive tax cuts for the rich, the crushing of trade unions, deregulation, privatization, outsourcing and competition in public services.”[76] Panitch and Gindin explain that “neoliberalism was essentially a *political* response to the democratic gains that had been previously achieved by working classes and which had become, from capital’s perspective, barriers to accumulation.”[77] In contrast to the neoliberal rhetoric, neoliberalism required the state as “the key actor” and its success did not signify “institutional retreat” but “the expansion and consolidation of the networks of institutional linkages to an already existing capitalism.”[78]

Nowadays, the “neoliberal system of class power and inequality”[79] permeates every facet of society. The political scientist, Wendy Brown, observes that

neoliberalism is “a peculiar form of reason that configures all aspects of existence in economic terms.”[80] Political and “other heretofore noneconomic spheres and activities” are economized because “neoliberal reason . . . is converting the distinctly *political* character, meaning, and operation of democracy’s constituent elements into *economic* ones.”[81] In short, neoliberalism turns politics into economics, and the question is always and only: Does this activity make money? If not, it becomes part of a series of “quaint concerns”[82] that we cannot afford anymore. In the growing reliance on data analytics, the drive toward efficiency, marketability, and monetization increases the marginalization and elimination of any societal activity that does not reinforce the neoliberal agenda.

For progressive thinkers, the neoliberal ideology is the root cause for many social and political problems around the globe.[83] For instance, the British writer, George Monbiot, claims that neoliberalism “sees competition as the defining characteristic of human relations” and “redefines citizens as consumers, whose democratic choices are best exercised by buying and selling, a process that rewards merit and punishes inefficiency.” As the neoliberal position “maintains that ‘the market’ delivers benefits that could never be achieved by planning,”[84] it forces workers and citizens alike to submit to the privatization of public services such as energy, water, trains, planes, health services, education, roads, and even prisons. Meanwhile, freedom has become the rallying cry of the neoliberal ideology. It wants freedom from regulation, freedom from any kind of collective responsibility and the common good, and freedom to do as one pleases without regard for anybody else. The “markets” are said to run supreme, solving any problem of society. Nobody articulates it better than the cultural critic, Henry A. Giroux, when he explains:

> [N]eoliberalism as a form of economic Darwinism attempts to undermine all forms of solidarity capable of challenging market-driven values and social relations, promoting the virtues of an unbridled individualism almost pathological in its disdain for community, social responsibility, public values, and the public good.[85]

On the educational and social levels, neoliberal ideology eliminates the conditions for critical inquiry, the value of moral responsibility, and the quest for social or economic justice. As the logic of neoliberalism requires “privatization, commodification, deregulation, militarization, hypermasculinity, and a ruthless ‘competitive struggle in which only the fittest could survive,’”[86] authoritarian regimes of the corporate-driven state are transforming “[t]he democratic imagination . . . into a data machine that marshals its inhabitants into the

neoliberal dreamworld of babbling consumers and armies of exploitative labor whose ultimate goal is to accumulate capital and initiate individuals into the brave new surveillance/punishing state that merges Orwell's Big Brother with Huxley's mind-altering soma."[87]

One of the most dangerous results of these decades-old developments are the ensuing political crises. The sociologist, Charles Derber, published an entire book on ten strategies for alternative grassroots mobilization in opposition to the neoliberal condition that threatens to turn into "the specter of fascism."[88] In his view, all of us have to become part of a "universal resistance for social justice, equal rights, and democracy" to uphold common values, such as "a concern for others, a desire to help those in need, a belief in justice, a lack of faith in the 'Establishment' and the rich people in power, and a desire to make a difference."[89] He advises that this resistance must be based on "a new universalizing approach"[90] that the feminist writer, Audre Lorde, envisioned when she observed: "There is no thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives."[91]

Accordingly, Derber advises to develop resistance to the ten systemic ways in which neoliberal ideology is spreading. He lists them in the following way:

1. Universalizing Extreme Inequality
2. Universalizing Global Control
3. Universalizing the Corporation and Corporate Power
4. Universalizing Authoritarianism, Militarism, Surveillance, and Repression
5. Universalizing Ideological Control
6. Universalizing Western Ways of Knowing
7. Universalizing Trans-Species Violence and Destruction to Nature
8. Universalizing "Kochamamie" Corporatized Democracy
9. Universalizing Existential Threats to All Life
10. Universalizing the Death Culture.[92]

To counteract these ten neoliberal principles, Derber comes up with strategies of resistance. He calls them "ten new 'rules of the road'" that nurture movements of resistance to the "universalized system power with new unifying forms of popular power."[93] Here are the ten new rules of resistance to neoliberal power:

1. Fight the Power, A.K.A. the System
2. Win the Majority
3. Converge!
4. Democratize the World
5. Protect Mother Earth
6. Say Yes to Alternatives
7. Create Media of, by, and for the People
8. Let's Get Political
9. Think, Learn, and Teach
10. Choose Live and Love.[94]

Detailed explanations for each rule appear in Derber's 315-page book. What becomes clear is the need for feminist biblical scholarship to take seriously the impact of neoliberal ideology on biblical studies and to join the universalizing resistance movement. The six essays in this Handbook's section entitled "The Impact of Neoliberalism on Feminist Biblical Interpretation" illustrate the stony but indispensable path ahead.

(Digital) Media Cultures

The third part of the fourfold framework focuses on the concept of (digital) media cultures. They include both analog and digital media, hence the parenthesis for the adjective "digital." Analog cultures have, of course, been around for a long time, including as commentaries on the Bible. The visual arts, fiction writing and poetry, and music are all part of the cultural artifacts of past and present Bible reading societies. Digital technologies have existed since the twentieth century, but they have gained attention from biblical scholars only during the past few decades. How both analog and digital technologies have shaped the various media cultures is of growing interest to feminist Bible scholars. In general, the academic field of biblical studies, as it has emerged during the modern era since the sixteenth century CE, has investigated (digital) media cultures as a research area only hesitatingly since the late 1990s. As a text-oriented, historically defined endeavor, biblical research was defined apart from cultural appropriations of the Bible. Central to the field's academic status has been the quest for historical origins, which precluded the systematic and

detailed analysis of the Bible's impact on popular cultures. The focus on historical origins has dominated biblical studies since the emergence of modernity despite the countless artistic appropriations of biblical texts, characters, or topics in the realm of art, for instance. For several centuries, Bible critics considered such appropriations as being outside the scholarly realm of the field of biblical studies.

This mindset only changed when some feminist and non-feminist Bible scholars became interested in (digital) media cultures as worthy research topics, publishing their works with increasing frequency. These scholars followed cultural-studies researchers in general, investigating the socio-political forces in society since the 1950s or 1960s, when British scholars began investigating working-class issues as part of their research on the relationship between everyday cultural expressions and the political economy. The founding of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham by Richard Hoggart in 1964, later run by his assistant Stuart Hall, is usually mentioned as the official starting point for the emergence of cultural studies as an academic field. The origins of cultural studies thus lie in left-leaning scholarship on the interplay between culture and politics. Thus, a Marxist and neo-Gramscian trajectory originally shaped the scholarly discourse. The founding generation of cultural criticism has also posited that popular culture be part of analyzing the power differentials in society, as popular culture creates consent of working people to class stratified society. In other words, cultural critics have originally exposed popular culture as a "soft" expression of stratified society that allows the ruling class to forego on brute force and violence, if possible.

The field of cultural studies embraces a wide spectrum of academic disciplines as it is inherently interdisciplinary, multi-perspectival, and methodologically variable. Among the academic disciplines are sociology, anthropology, philosophy, political science, literary studies, computer studies, media and communication studies, international studies, and religious studies. Many anthologies have been published in the past few decades, covering the wide spectrum of theories and topics of cultural-studies research. A widely read publication is the anthology, entitled *The Cultural Studies Reader* that Simon During edited.[95] The volume consists of eight sections. The first section, entitled "Theory and method," includes essays by Stuart Hall, Antonio Gramsci, Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes, Pierre Bourdieu, all distinguished theorists of cultural studies, and three lesser-known critics. The second section, entitled "Culture in space," presents essays by Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault, and

Gille Deleuze who discuss the power of space and politics. The remaining six sections are "Globalization/postmodernism," "Nationalism/postcolonialism/multiculturalism," "Science, nature and cyberculture," "Sexuality and gender," "Consumption and the market," and "Media and public spheres." Notoriously, none of the essays include references to religion, although so many people around the globe practice their religions every day. Two observations emerge in light of this volume's organizational structure. First, the conceptual structure privileges Western male theorists. Second, gender and sexuality are relegated into one particular section whereas (digital) technology, media, and art appear throughout various sections. This bias remains untheorized so far. Yet the bias also suggests that digital media cultures has gained increasing visibility in popular culture.

Yet another issue about contemporary cultural-studies research deserves mention. Sometimes such research lacks the theoretical and political edge of earlier cultural-studies scholarship. For instance, the comprehensive textbook, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, written by Chris Barker and Emma A. Jane,[96] bristles with numerous opportunities to elaborate on the intersections of culture and power, hegemony and structures of domination. Yet the issue-oriented reviews on the various cultural topics present many sections and subsections with little attention to these intersections. The volume even culminates in a discussion on "Neo-pragmatism and cultural studies," centering on U.S.-American philosopher Richard Rorty's "politics without foundation,"[97] as if to suggest that cultural critics do not favor particular political perspectives. On the positive side, the volume includes extensive surveys on the cultural impact of television, social media, and digital media, all of which touch on the "cultural politics" of the internet and related digital data cultures.[98] Still, these sections do not address issues of race, ethnicity, gender, or theoretical concerns. That the textbook's authors do not include any references to religion in today's world is another remarkable omission that is, however, characteristic of contemporary academic discourse.

Despite the negligence of religion in the field of cultural studies, the impact of cultural studies on the academic study of the Bible has been substantial. It is obvious why this would be so. Part of two highly influential religious traditions, Judaism and Christianity, and foundational to another hugely popular religious tradition, Islam, the Bible shows up everywhere in the world. Hence, biblical research in the visual arts, film, literature, music, architecture, or various exegetical and theological interpretation histories is a flourishing research area in biblical studies today.[99] One of the first anthologies on cultural biblical studies

was edited by J. Cheryl Exum and Stephen D. Moore in 1998. Entitled *Biblical Studies/Cultural Studies*, the book resulted from an international colloquium at the University of Sheffield in April 1997.[100] The volume's editors explain that "the practice of cultural studies offers critical tools for analyzing the Bible's position of privilege in the Western canon and provides a theoretical perspective from which to look not only at the production of meaning in the past but also at ways the Bible and contemporary culture mutually influence each other."[101] The nineteen essays of the book examine the intersections of biblical and cultural studies with various discussions of the Bible as a cultural object, the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim interpretation history of Genesis 39 in paintings, drawings, or illustrations, and the depiction of Jesus in Monty Python's *Life of Bryon*. Interestingly, considerations on the theory and practice of cultural scholarship in biblical studies are largely absent. Individual case studies on various and highly selective topics on the appearance of the Bible in culture dominate the book.

The reticence of biblical scholars to engage in meta-level discussions on the cultural study of the Bible is also prevalent in another volume. Entitled *The Blackwell Companion to the Bible and Culture* and published in 2012, this volume illustrates the tendency to interrogate the Bible within specific past and present cultures, relatively independent of theoretical, methodological, or socio-political considerations. Edited by John F. A. Sawyer, the volume consists of four sections. The first section offers a linear chronology of Bible readings from ancient Near Eastern times to the "Modern World." The second section includes essays on significant geographical and religious appropriations of the Bible around the globe. The third section covers aesthetic and performative renderings of the Bible, such as in literature, film, music, or the visual arts. The fourth section presents essays about the Bible as it is read in areas such as politics, psychology, or post-colonialism.

In short, the study of the Bible in culture turns into an extensive, diligent, and informative rehearsal of the abundant ways in which cultural interpretations have appropriated the Bible.[102] The focus is on the afterlife of the Bible. A vibrant and colorful mosaic of cultural biblical interpretations has thus emerged in the academic study of the Bible. The ten essays of this Handbook's third section, "(Digital) Media Cultures," illustrate the enduring scholarly energy and creativity in cultural biblical scholarship with feminist and gender issues in mind.

Intersectionality

The fourth part of the fourfold framework investigates the concept of intersectionality. Perhaps no other analytical concept has gained public prominence and theoretical acceptance like the notion of intersectionality. Originally coined by the U.S.-American legal scholar, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, the concept refers to the analytical insight that the various structures of domination related to gender and sexuality always intersect with other sociopolitical categories, such as race, ethnicity, class, geopolitical location, nationality, age, religion, or able-bodiedness. All of these categories form interlocking systems of power that feminist theorists need to consider simultaneously in their studies of discriminatory practices in the world.

Crenshaw articulated the concept of intersectionality in 1989 when she explained that traditional feminist ideas and antiracist policies exclude the particular sociopolitical circumstances of black women in the U.S.A., as they face overlapping discrimination of gender and race. Crenshaw observed: "Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated."[103] Other feminist theorists, such as Jewish feminists, socialist feminists, lesbian feminists, or postcolonial feminists, also asserted the link between gender and other social categories, but the theoretical clarity of Crenshaw's essay challenging the exclusive focus on gender as the sole category for feminist theorizing had a powerful impact. It ensured that feminists recognize the ongoing significance of white-supremacist and patriarchal strategies of "divide and conquer" in the United States and the need of feminist analysis to consider the interlocking systems of oppression.

The concept of intersectionality has also been gladly employed internationally, empowering feminist thinkers and activists alike to make connections among the broad spectrum of unjust and oppressive sociopolitical, economic, religious, and global infrastructures as they relate to gender and sexuality. The concept has given feminist theorists and activists the vocabulary to build broad-based coalitions toward the goal of gender justice, equality, and peace. In addition, the notion of intersectionality has alerted progressive feminists to the dangers of the white liberal feminist slide into essentializing discourse on the gender binary, as it has been conventionally defined in many cultures and is urgently defended among religious fundamentalists today.

Feminist approaches to the Hebrew Bible have also benefited from the

conviction that the analysis of gender and sexuality needs to be based on an intersectional analysis. Although scholarly articles and books continue to be published that advance naturalized views about "women" in the Bible, thus disregarding the hermeneutical insights on the sociopolitical limitations and even dangers of essentialized gender discourse, the employment of intersectional feminist principles in biblical interpretation demonstrates the ongoing need to denaturalize biblical women and gender at all times. L. Juliana Claassens and Carolyn J. Sharp edited a volume that explores the intersectional connections within variously defined feminist frameworks.[104] According to the editors, their volume represents "a good example of new interpretive perspectives that might emerge by bringing divergent texts and context together." The thirteen contributions thus foster "a whole new line of inquiry regarding biblical text"[105] and open up "interpretive traditions to emancipatory visions of community" by "celebrat[ing] intersectionality, interrogat[ing] power, and embrac[ing] ambiguity."[106]

Importantly, the anthology affirms that feminist biblical interpreters cannot focus only on biblical women since essentializing discourse on gender and sexuality belongs to a bygone era. All contributors affirm that feminist biblical exegesis must be grounded in intersectional understandings of gender and sexuality. For instance, Claassen explains succinctly: "This idea of multiple, intersecting reading lenses resonates with my own work as is also evident in my contribution to this particular volume in which I explored gender, postcolonial, queer, and trauma perspectives on the metaphor of a woman in labor that is used throughout the book of Jeremiah."[107] Similar research exists in feminist and womanist biblical works, taking seriously the intersectionalities of gender and sexuality in their readings of the Bible.[108] The eleven essays included in the present Handbook illustrate the wide spectrum of feminist intersectional analysis in Hebrew Bible studies, ranging from historical to queer, transgender, egalitarian-evangelical, animal, ecological, interfaith, and cross-religious studies of biblical texts, characters, and topics.

In sum, the four broadly defined conceptual frameworks of globalization, neoliberalism, (digital) media cultures, and intersectionality reconceptualize the feminist study of the Hebrew Bible. They move it from the antiquarian-historical, modernist epistemic paradigm to the emancipatory, democratizing paradigm, thereby equipping feminist exegetes to investigate biblical texts and their variously defined and located interpretation histories as part of the rhetoric and ethics of feminist inquiry and transformation.

Why Feminist Hebrew Bible Studies Matters in a World Threatened by Ecological Devastation, Technofascist Domination, Hegemonic Economic Exploitation of Billions of People, and the Rise of Ethno-Religious Nationalist Fundamentalism

Much has changed since feminist scholars began interpreting the Hebrew Bible during the aftermath of the U.S.-American Civil Rights Movement, the global emergence of the ecological movement, the successful dismantling of the Western colonial empire, the rise of computer technologies, and the financialization of capitalist societies worldwide. The loud and systematic dismantling of patriarchal, androcentric, and heteronormative hegemonies, within their intersectional manifestations, has been on the forefront of feminist theory and practice ever since. Deeply ingrained sexism, misogyny, heteronormativity, and homophobia in academic and religious institutions have not been particularly accommodating to feminist demands for sociopolitical, cultural, economic, intellectual, or religious change and transformation.

On the contrary. The relentless move toward neoliberal, technocratic, and corporate-driven shifts that are accompanied by religious and secular fundamentalism globally need to be recognized as hegemonic power moves. They disable requests for emancipation, democracy, and justice. The academic field of biblical studies serves as a showcase for the tremendous powers involved that uphold the status quo wherever it is questioned. Feminist biblical scholars, working at the beginning of the twenty-first century, have thus to consider the changed global circumstances pertaining to the academic study of the Bible. All of the academic and religious institutions in which scholarly investigations of the Bible enjoyed financial, cultural, intellectual, and theological support experience considerable pressure to survive the sociopolitical, economic, cultural, and religious changes under way. A major component of these changes has to do with the fact that the market economics extends to "a series of hitherto 'noneconomic' realms" because "economics has become the default setting for understanding virtually everything in our world."[109] With the emergence of "fiat money" since the collapse of the Bretton Woods system in 1971–73, the cultural

logic of value has become free floating and radically open. As Teresa J. Hornsby observes so poignantly: “If sexuality and gender are constructed in collusion with capitalistic power, a shift in capitalism should create different sexual and gender normatives.”[110] Since “new postmodern capitalism requires submissive subjects, . . . we as postmodern biblical scholars are doing our part to produce them.”[111]

How then shall feminist scholars read the Hebrew Bible at this “new historical conjuncture in which political rule has been replaced by corporate sovereignty, consumerism becomes the only obligation of citizenship, and the only value that matters is exchange value”?[112] It seems to get clearer and clearer by the day that the post-postmodern era is about authoritarian regimes of power. Under such conditions, how ought feminist Bible scholars interpret biblical texts so that they do not teach complicity “with authoritarian practices”?[113] And most importantly, how can feminist biblical interpreters challenge authoritarian practices “and under what circumstances”?[114] As Henry A. Giroux insists again and again, “[t]he situation is dire when people seem no longer interested in contesting such power.”[115]

In the age of “manufactured stupidity,” the suppression of “critical thinking, dissent, and organized resistance,” the “embrace of anti-Enlightenment ideologies, the rise of a poisonous religious fundamentalism, and the emergence of a culture of conformity” in the Western world and beyond,[116] the task of feminist biblical studies is obvious. It must dismantle the dangers of biblical literalism, counter the omnipresent binaries of us versus them, female and male, or the common good against private property.[117] It needs to nurture empathetic thought and practice to develop a readerly sense of justice, integrity, and peace beyond the binaries of naturalized, essentialized views about the gendered and sexualized texts and the world in which these texts are read. It must make conscious unconsciously held assumptions on gender and sexuality in their intersectional dimensions, bring minoritized and marginalized voices to the table, connect with different religious and intellectual traditions, recover and implement alternative reading possibilities, and deconstruct (neo-)colonizing methodologies about the biblical past and present. Since billions of humans across planet Earth read the Bible even today, the feminist task of dismantling authoritarian regimes of power that insist on patriarchal, androcentric, and heteronormative structures of domination is urgent.

This *Handbook on Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible* contributes to this urgent task. It offers a vision for feminist biblical scholarship beyond the

hegemonic status quo prevalent in the field of biblical studies, in many religious organizations and institutions that claim the Bible as a sacred text, and among the public that often mentions the Bible to establish religious, political, and socio-cultural restrictions for gendered practices. That such boundary making is still acceptable, considered normative, and viewed with approval even from dissenters illustrates that feminist biblical scholars have a long road to travel until the Bible will finally be read as a liberatory text and societies will be freed from discriminatory and unjust practices related to gender and sexuality. The task of feminist biblical scholars thus continues to be the interpretation of the Bible in conversation with and in the context of the relentless and manifold issues and practices that keep the gender caste system in place even in the early part of the twenty-first century. The essays of this volume offer conceptual and exegetical ways forward.

[1] See, e.g., Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, eds., *Women's Bible Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1992; expanded second ed., 1998; third rev. and updated ed.; 2012); Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker, eds., *Feminist Biblical Interpretation: A Compendium of Critical Commentary on the Books of the Bible and Related Literature*, trans. Lisa E. Dahill, Everett R. Kalin, Nancy Lukens, Linda M. Maloney, Barbara Rumscheidt, Martin Rumscheidt, and Tina Steiner (Grand Rapids, MI / Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2012); Gregg Drinkwater, Joshua Lesser, and David Shneer, eds., *Torah Queeries: Weekly Commentaries on the Hebrew Bible* (New York, NY / London: New York University Press, 2009); Tamara Cohn Eshkenazi and Andrea L. Weiss, eds., *The Torah: A Women's Commentary* (New York, NY: WRJ/URJ Press, 2008); Deryn Guest, Robert E. Goss, Mona West, and Thomas Bohache, eds., *The Queer Bible Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 2006); Catherine Clark Kroeger and Mary J. Evans, eds., *The IVP Women's Bible Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002). The first comprehensively designed feminist Hebrew Bible series was edited by Athalya Brenner from 1993–2001, with one co-edited volume. All volumes were published by Sheffield Academic Press. They are: *A Feminist Companion to Genesis* (1993); *A Feminist Companion to Judges* (1993); *A Feminist Companion to the Song of Songs* (1993); *A Feminist Companion to Ruth* (1993); *A Feminist Companion to Samuel to Kings* (l 994); *A Feminist Companion to Wisdom Literature* (1995); *A Feminist Companion to Esther. Judith, and Susannah* (1995); *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets* (1995); A *Feminist Companion to the Hebrew Bible in the New Testament* (1996); Brenner and Carole R. Fontaine, eds., A *Feminist Companion to Reading of the Bible* (2001). The second series was also published by Athalya Brenner from 1998 to 2002 (with the exception of one co-edited volume) and published with Sheffield Academic Press: *Genesis: A Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)* (l998); *Judges: A Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)* (1999); *Ruth and Esther: A Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)* (1999): *Samuel and Kings: A Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)* (2000); *Exodus and Deuteronomy: A Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)*(1998); The *Song of Songs: A Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)* (2000); *Prophets and Daniel: A Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)* (2002); Brenner and Fontaine (eds.), *Wisdom and Psalms: A Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)* (1998). The editor of the New Testament series is Amy-Jill Levine, publishing a growing series with Bloomsbury Publishing since 2000.

[2] See, e.g., Yvonne Sherwood, ed., *The Bible and Feminism: Remapping the Field* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Linda Day and Carolyn Pressler, eds., *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World: An*

Introduction to Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Honor of Katharine Doob Sakenfeld (Louisville, KY / London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006); Alice Bach, ed., *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader* (New York, NY / London: Routledge, 1999); Harold C. Washington, Susan Lochrie Graham, and Pamela Thimmes, eds., *Escaping Eden: New Feminist Perspectives on the Bible* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1999). The projected fifty-eight volumes of the feminist commentary series, *Wisdom Commentary*, are published by Liturgical Press. The series is currently the most ambitious project in feminist biblical studies. The twenty-two volumes of *The Bible and Women* encyclopedia are produced as an ongoing international collaboration in which each volume is published in four languages (English, German, Italian, Spanish) and published by four presses: the SBL Press, Kohlhammer, Editorial Verbo Divino, and Il Pozzo di Giacobbe (http://www.bibleandwomen.org/EN/index.php).

[3] Sheffield Phoenix Press published them in 2013, 2014, and 2016 respectively.

[4] For the critical analysis of concepts, such as innovation or excellence, as integral to the anti-feminist academic shift to neoliberalism and even U.S.-American fascism, see, e.g., Henry A. Giroux, *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2014); Mitchum Huehls and Rachel Greenwald Smith, eds., *Neoliberalism and Contemporary Literary Culture* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2017); Henry A. Giroux, *American Nightmare: Facing the Challenge of Fascism* (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Bookstore, 2018).

[5] For more details, see, e.g., Bonnie Birk, *Christine de Pizan and Biblical Wisdom: A Feminist-Theological Point of View* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2005).

[6] For more details, see, e.g., Joy A. Schroeder, *Deborah's Daughters: Gender Politics and Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford / New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 73–75.

[7] Schroeder provides a plethora of detailed references and sources for this time period; see *Deborah's Daughters*, 106–38.

[8] For details on these nineteenth-century women readers of the Bible and other women readers who lived in earlier centuries, see, e.g., Marion Ann Taylor and Agnes Choi, eds., *Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2012). For specific volumes on nineteenth-century women readers, see Marion Ann Taylor and Christiana de Groot, eds., *Women of War Women of Woe: Joshua and Judges through the Eyes of Nineteenth-Century Female Biblical Interpreters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016); Marion Ann Taylor and Heather E. Weir, eds., *Let Her Speak for Herself: Nineteenth-Century Women Writing on Women in Genesis* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006).

[9] Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "Introduction," in *The Woman's Bible* (reprint; Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1993), 11.

[10] Quoted in Katie Kern, *Ms. Stanton's Bible* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 19.

[11] Stanton, "Comments on Genesis," in *Women's Bible*, 20.

[12] Ibid., 21.

[13] Ibid., 21.

[14] For additional information, see Susanne Scholz, *Introducing the Women's Hebrew Bible: Feminism, Gender Justice, and the Study of the Old Testament* (second rev. and exp. ed.; London / New York, NY: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 13–42, esp. 19–23.

[15] For an introduction to womanist biblical hermeneutics, see, e.g., Gay L. Byron and Vanessa Lovelace, eds., *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2016); Nyasha Junior, *An Introduction to Womanist Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015).

[16] For a selective discussion of the various intersectional connections, see, e.g., Susanne Scholz, ed.,

Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Retrospect, Vol. 2: *Social Location* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ed., *Feminist Bible Studies in the Twentieth Century: Scholarship and Movement* (Bible and Women 9.1; Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2014).

[17] Judith Plaskow, "Movement and Emerging Scholarship: Feminist Biblical Scholarship in the 1970s in the United States," in *Feminist Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century: Scholarship and Movement*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (The Bible and Women 9.1; Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2014), 23, 24–25.

[18] Ibid., 22.

[19] Plaskow, "Movement and Emerging Scholarship," 34.

[20] So Alison Jasper, "Raising the Dead? Reflections of Feminist Biblical Criticism in the Light of Pamela Sue Anderson's Book *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion*, 1988," *Feminist Theology* 9.26 (January 2001): 110.

[21] For a more detailed historical outline, see, e.g., Susanne Scholz, "From the 'Woman's Bible' to the 'Women's Bible': The History of Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible," chap. in *Introducing the Women's Hebrew Bible: Feminism, Gender Justice, and the Study of the Old Testament* (second rev. and exp. ed.; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 13–42.

[22] Carol Meyers, Toni Craven, and Ross S. Kramer, eds., *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2000).

[23] Athalya Brenner, "Epilogue: Babies and Bathwater on the Road," in *Her Master's Tools? Feminist and Postcolonial Engagements of Historical-Critical Discourse*, ed. Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2005), 338.

[24] Pamela J. Milne, "Toward Feminist Companionship: The Future of Feminist Biblical Studies and Feminism," in *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods, and Strategies*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Carole Fontaine (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 53.

[25] Deryn Guest, *Beyond Feminist Biblical Studies* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012), 150.

[26] See, e.g., L. Juliana Claasens and Carolyn J. Sharp, eds., *Feminist Frameworks and the Bible: Power, Ambiguity, and Intersectionality* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2019); Johanna Stiebert and Musa W. Dube, eds., *The Bible, Centres and Margins: Dialogues between Postcolonial African and British Scholars* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018); Mitzi J. Smith, ed., *I Found God in Me: A Womanist Biblical Hermeneutics Reader* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015); Hisako Kinukawa, ed., *Migration and Diaspora: Exegetical Voices of Women in Northeast Asian Countries* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2014).

[27] Esther Fuchs, "Points of Resonance," in *On the Cutting Edge: The Study of Women in Biblical Worlds*, ed. Jane Schaberg, Alice Bach, and Esther Fuchs (New York, NY: Continuum, 2004), 12. See also her work titled *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative: Reading the Hebrew Bible as a Woman* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000).

[28] Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner, *Contextualizing Gender in Early Christian Discourse: Thinking Beyond Thecla* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2009), 169.

[29] Ibid., 170.

[30] Ibid., 169.

[31] Milne, "Toward Feminist Companionship," 43.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Hector Avalos, *The End of Biblical Studies* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2007), 316.

[34] Milne, “Toward Feminist Companionship,” 43.

[35] See, e.g., Marc Bousquet, *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2008).

[36] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 254.

[37] Vander Stichele and Penner, *Contextualizing Gender*, 173. For books that take seriously contemporary issues of the world today, see, e.g., Anne F. Elvey, *An Ecological Feminist Reading of the Gospel of Luke: A Gestational Paradigm* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 2005); Deryn Guest, *When Deborah Met Jael: Lesbian Biblical Hermeneutics* (London: SCM, 2005); Carole R. Fontaine, *With Eyes of Flesh: The Bible, Gender and Human Rights* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2008); Susanne Scholz, *Sacred Witness: Rape in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010).

[38] See the online presence of the CBMW at http://www.cbmw.org. For an analysis of the complementarians, see Susanne Scholz, “The Christian Right’s Discourse on Gender and the Bible,” *JFSR* 21.1 (2005): 81–100. See also Karen Strand Winslow, “Recovering Redemption for Women: Feminist Exegesis in North American Evangelism,” in *Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Retrospect* (Vol. 2: *Social Location*), ed. Susanne Scholz (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2014), 269–89.

[39] Catherine Clark Kroeger and Mary J. Evans, eds., *The IVP Women’s Bible Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

[40] See, e.g., recent publications by theologically conservative publishing houses: Stephen J. Binz, *Women of the Gospels: Friends and Disciples of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2011); Binz, *Women of the Torah: Matriarchs and Heroes of Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2011); Robin Gallaher Branch, *Jeroboam’s Wife: The Enduring Contributions of the Old Testament’s Least-Known Women* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009); Lynn H. Cohick, *Women in the World of the Earliest Christians: Illuminating Ancient Ways of Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009); Tammi J. Schneider, *Mothers of Promise: Women in the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008).

[41] Deryn Guest, Robert E. Goss, Mona West, and Thomas Bohache, eds., *The Queer Bible Commentary* (London: SMC, 2006); Robert E. Goss and Mona West, eds., *Take Back the Word: A Queer Reading of the Bible* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim, 2000). See also Guest, *When Deborah Met Jael*; Theodore W. Jennings, *Jacob’s Wound: Homoerotic Narrative in the Literature of Ancient Israel* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2005); Theodore W. Jennings, *The Man Jesus Loved: Homoerotic Narratives from the New Testament* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim, 2003); Robert E. Goss, *Queering Christ: Beyond Jesus Acted Up* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim, 2002); Ken Stone, *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim, 2001); Ken Stone, *Practicing Safer Texts: Food, Sex and Bible in Queer Perspective* (London: T&T Clark, 2005); Stephen D. Moore, *God’s Beauty Parlor: And Other Queer Spaces in and around the Bible* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001); Daniel A. Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality* (Tajique, NM: Alamo Square Press, 2000); Stephen D. Moore, *God’s Gym: Divine Male Bodies of the Bible* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996); Bernadette J. Brooten, *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Nancy Wilson, *Our Tribe: Queer Folks, God, Jesus, and the Bible* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995).

[42] Guest, *When Deborah Met Jael*, 107.

[43] Ibid., 108.

[44] Ibid., 112.

[45] Stone, *Queer Commentary*, 25.

[46] Ibid., 26.

[47] Ibid., 27.

[48] Guest et al., *Queer Bible Commentary*, xiii.

[49] See, e.g., Mary F. Foskett and Jeffrey Kah-Jin Kuan, eds., *Ways of Being, Ways of Reading: Asian American Biblical Interpretation* (St. Louis, KY: Chalice, 2006); Randall C. Bailey, Tat-siong Benny Liew and Fernando F. Segovia, eds., *They Were All Together in One Place? Toward Minority Biblical Criticism* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2009).

[50] For the significance of the flesh-and-blood readers, see the very influential volumes by Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, eds., *Reading from This Place* (Vol. 1: *Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States*; Vol. 2: *Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective*) (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995). For a more recent elaboration, see, e.g., Fernando F. Segovia, "Cultural Criticism: Expanding the Scope of Biblical Criticism," in *The Future of the Biblical Past: Envisioning Biblical Studies on a Global Key*, ed. Roland Boer and Fernando F. Segovia (Semeia Studies 66; Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2012), 307–37.

[51] Mai-Anh Le Tran, "Lot's Wife, Ruth, and Tô Thị: Gender and Racial Representation in a Theological Feast of Stories," in Foskett and Kuan, *Ways of Being, Ways of Reading*, 125.

[52] This and the following quotes are from Gale A. Yee, "Yin/Yang Is Not Me: An Exploration into an Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics," in Foskett and Kuan, *Ways of Being, Ways of Reading*, 156.

[53] For publications from the North American context, see, e.g., Joseph A. Marchal, *The Politics of Heaven: Women, Gender, and Empire in the Study of Paul* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008); Hee An Choi and Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, eds., *Engaging the Bible: Critical Readings from Contemporary Women* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006); Vander Stichele and Penner, *Her Master's Tools?* For publications from other contexts, see, e.g., Seong Hee Kim, *Mark, Women and Empire: A Korean Postcolonial Perspective* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2010); Jean Kyoung Kim, *Woman and Nation: An Intercontextual Reading of the Gospel of John from a Postcolonial/Feminist Perspective* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Musa W. Dube Shomanah, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis, KY: Chalice, 2000). See also Phyllis A. Bird, ed., *Reading the Bible as Women: Perspectives from Africa, Asia, and Latin America* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1997).

[54] See, e.g., Dora Mbuwayesango and Susanne Scholz, "Dialogical Beginnings: A Conversation on the Future of Feminist Biblical Studies," *JFSR* 25.2 (2009): 93–103. See also the ensuing nine responses on 103–43. For an integration of different voices into a single-voiced scholarly account, see, e.g., Barbara E. Reid, *Taking Up the Cross: New Testament Interpretations through Latina and Feminist Eyes* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007).

[55] A prolific feminist Bible scholar over her fifty-five-year career, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has published many books and articles. Her recent monographs explain the various exegetical-hermeneutical frameworks that have dominated biblical studies since the sixteenth century CE until today; see, e.g., Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Democratizing Biblical Studies: Toward an Emancipatory Educational Space* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009); *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007).

[56] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Power of the Word: Charting Critical Global Feminist Biblical Studies," in *Feminist New Testament Studies: Global and Future Perspectives*, ed., Kathleen O'Brien Wicker, Althea Spencer Miller, and Musa W. Dube (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 51.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid., 53.

[59] Ibid., 53–4.

[60] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Changing the Paradigms: Toward a Feminist Future of the Biblical Past," in *The Future of the Biblical Past: Envisioning Biblical Studies on a Global Key*, ed. Roland Boer and Fernando F. Segovia (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 301.

[61] So poignantly articulated by Elizabeth A. Castelli, "Globalization, Transnational Feminisms, and the Future of Biblical Critique," in *Feminist New Testament Studies: Global and Future Perspectives*, ed. Kathleen O'Brien Wicker, Althea Spencer Miller, and Musa W. Dube (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 67.

[62] Costas Lapavitsas, *Profiting without Producing: How Finance Exploits Us All* (London / New York, NY: Verso Books, 2013), 13.

[63] Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents Revisited: Anti-Globalization in the Era of Trump* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2018), 309.

[64] Ibid., 311.

[65] Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, eds., "Preface," in *Reading from this Place* (Vol. 1: *Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States*; Vol. 2: *Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective*), ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995).

[66] Ibid., Vol. 2, xi.

[67] For the growing list of titles, visit https://www.sbl-site.org/publications/Books_IVBS.aspx.

[68] Knut Holter and Louis C. Jonker, "Introduction," in *Global Hermeneutics? Reflections and Consequences*, ed. Knut Holter and Louis C. Jonker (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), vii.

[69] Vincent L. Wimbush, "Signifying on Scriptures: An African Diaspora Proposal for Radical Readings," in *Feminist New Testament Studies: Global and Future Perspectives*, ed., Kathleen O'Brien Wicker, Althea Spencer Miller, and Musa W. Dube (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 248.

[70] Ibid., 256.

[71] P. O. Abioje, "Biblical Response to Globalization: The Nigerian Context," *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology* (December 10, 2005): 33.

[72] Gold Okwuolise Anie, "Globalization and Demythologization in African Biblical Hermeneutics," *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology* (December 10, 2005): 75.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Roland Boer and Fernando F. Segovia, eds., *The Future of the Biblical Past: Envisioning Biblical Studies on a Global Key* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), xvi.

[75] Sheila Briggs, "Response: Globalization, Transnational Feminisms, and the Future of Biblical Critique," in *Feminist New Testament Studies: Global and Future Perspectives*, ed., Kathleen O'Brien Wicker, Althea Spencer Miller, and Musa W. Dube (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 82.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin, *The Making of Global Capitalism: The Political Economy of American Empire* (London: Verso, 2012), 15.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid., 338.

[80] Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2015), 17.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid., 23.

[83] See, e.g., George Monbiot, "Neoliberalism: The Ideology at the Root of All Our Problems," *The Guardian* (April 15, 2016): https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/15/neoliberalism-ideology-problem-george-monbiot.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Henry A. Giroux, *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2014), 2.

[86] Ibid., 16.

[87] Henry A. Giroux, *Dangerous Thinking in the Age of the New Authoritarianism* (London / New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), 12.

[88] Charles Derber, *Welcome to the Revolution: Universalizing Resistance for Social Justice and Democracy in Perilous Times* (New York, NY / London: Routledge, 2017), 3.

[89] Ibid., xxiii.

[90] Ibid., 3.

[91] Audre Lorde, Quotes—Goodreads, https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/18486.Audre_Lorde.

[92] Derber, *Welcome to the Revolution*, 2.

[93] Ibid., 5.

[94] Ibid.

[95] Simon During, ed., *The Cultural Studies Reader* (third ed.; Abingdon / New York, NY: Routledge, 2007). The first edition was published in 1997.

[96] Chris Barker and Emma A. Jane, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice* (fifth ed.; London: SAGE, 2016).

[97] Ibid., 625–31, esp. 626–28.

[98] Ibid., 400–56, 457–512.

[99] See, e.g., Richard G. Walsh, ed., *T&T Clark Companion to the Bible and Film* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018); Bradford A. Anderson and Jonathan F. Kearney, eds., *Ireland and the Reception of the Bible: Social and Cultural Perspectives* (London / New York, NY: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018); Caroline Blyth and Nasili Vaka'uta, eds., *The Bible and Art: Perspectives from Oceania* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017); Colleen M. Conway, *Sex and Slaughter in the Tent of Jael: A Cultural History of a Biblical Story* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017); Philip Goff, Arthur E. Farnsley, and Peter J. Thuesen, eds., *The Bible in American Life* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017); Laura Copier and Caroline Vander Stichele, eds., *Close Encounters between Bible and Film: An Interdisciplinary Encounter* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2016); Rhonda Burnette-Bletsch, ed., *The Bible in Motion: A Handbook of the Bible and Its Reception in Film* (2 vols.; Berlin / Boston, MA: Walter de Gruyter, 2016); Melissa C. Stewart, ed., *Simulating Aichele: Essays in Bible, Film, Culture and Theory* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2015); Adele Reinhartz, ed., *Bible and Cinema: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2013); Pantelis Michelakis and Maria Wyke, *The Ancient World in Silent Cinema* (Cambridge / New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Max Stern, *Bible & Music: Influences of the Old Testament on Western Music* (Jersey City, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, 2011); Elaine Mary Wainwright and Philip Leroy, eds., *The Bible in/and Popular Culture: A Creative Encounter* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2010); Beth Hawkins Benedix, ed., *Subverting Scriptures: Critical Reflections on the Use of the Bible* (New York, NY: Palgrave

Macmillan, 2009); David Shepherd, ed., *Images of the Word: Hollywood's Bible and Beyond* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2008); J. Cheryl Exum, ed., *Retellings: The Bible in Literature, Music, Art and Film* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); J. Cheryl Exum and Ela Nutu, eds., *Between the Text and the Canvas: The Bible and Art in Dialogue* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007); Mark Roncace and Patrick Gray, eds., *Teaching the Bible through Popular Culture and the Arts* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2007); Martin O'Kane, *Painting the Text: The Artist as Biblical Interpreter* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007); Eric S. Christianson, Ecclesiastes through the Centuries (Malden, MA / Oxford: Blackwell Publisher, 2007); J. Cheryl Exum, ed., *The Bible in Film—the Bible and Film* (Leiden: Brill, 2006); George Aichele, ed., *Culture, Entertainment and the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); Vincent L. Wimbush, ed., *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2000); Theophus Harold Smith, *Conjuring Culture: Biblical Formations of Black America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[100] J. Cheryl Exum and Stephen D. Moore, eds., *Biblical Studies/Cultural Studies* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

[101] Ibid., 19.

[102] See, e.g., Claudia Setzer and David A. Shefferman, eds., *The Bible and American Culture: A Sourcebook* (London / New York, NY: Routledge, 2011); Martin O'Kane, *Bible Art Gallery* (The Bible in the Modern World 21; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011); J. Cheryl Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women* (Gender, Culture, Theory 3; JSOT Sup Series 215; Sheffield: Sheffield Press, 1996);

[103] Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *The University of Chicago Legal Form* (1989): 140; available at: http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8.

[104] L. Juliana Claassens and Carolyn J. Sharp, eds., *Feminist Frameworks and the Bible: Power, Ambiguity, and Intersectionality* (Library of Hebrew Bible / Old Testament Studies 630; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017).

[105] Ibid., 3.

[106] Ibid., 7.

[107] Ibid., 21.

[108] See, e.g., Gale A. Yee, ed., *The Hebrew Bible: Feminist and Intersectional Perspectives* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2018); Mitzi J. Smith, *Womanist Sass and Talk Back: Social (In)justice, Intersectionality, and Biblical Interpretation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018); Simone Sinn, Dina El Omari, and Anne Hege Grung, eds., *Transformative Readings of Sacred Scriptures: Christians and Muslims in Dialogue* (Leipzig / Geneva, Switzerland: Evangelische Verlangsanstalt / The Lutheran World Federation, 2017); Susanne Scholz, *The Bible as Political Artifact: On the Feminist Study of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017); Nele Spiering-Schomborg, Rita Burrichter, Bernhard Grümme et al., 'Man kann sich nicht entscheiden, als was man geboren wird': Exodus 1 im Horizont von Intersektionalität und empirischer Bibeldidaktik (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 2017); Gay L. Byron and Vanessa Lovelace, eds., *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2016); Randall C. Bailey and Tat-siong Benny Liew, eds., *They Were All Together in One Place: Toward Minority Biblical Criticism* (Leiden / Boston, MA: Brill, 2009); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Democratizing Biblical Studies: Toward an Emancipatory Educational Space* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

[109] Jeffrey T. Nealon, *Post-Postmondernism or, the Cultural Logic of Just-in-Time Capitalism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 180.

[110] Teresa J. Hornsby, “Capitalism, Masochism, and Biblical Interpretation,” in *Bible Trouble: Queer Reading at the Boundaries of Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Teresa J. Hornsby and Ken Stone (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2011), 137.

[111] Ibid., 153.

[112] Giroux, *Dangerous Thinking*, 11.

[113] Ibid., 10.

[114] Ibid.

[115] Ibid., 12.

[116] Ibid., 19.

[117] The insistence on the gender binaries is ongoing and relentless; see, e.g., Congregation for Catholic Education, “‘Male and Female He Created Them’: Towards a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education” (Rome: Vatican City, 2019). Available at: http://www.educatio.va/content/dam/cec/Documenti/19_0997_INGLESE.pdf.

PART I

THE IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION ON FEMINIST BIBLICAL STUDIES

CHAPTER 1

BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION AND KYRIARCHAL GLOBALIZATION

ELISABETH SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA

In *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory*, Clare Hemmings reminds us that it matters how we tell our stories[1] and histories.[2] In this essay I tell the story of feminist biblical studies in political terms as the story of a critical feminist analytics of domination. By this I mean the analysis of the inscription of kyriarchy in the biblical artifact that has been developed by feminist studies in general and by feminist studies of the Bible in particular.[3] The variegated contributions in the hefty volume *The Bible and Feminism*, edited by Yvonne Sherwood, tell this story with a focus on the diversity of approaches and frameworks; in my edited volumes, entitled *Searching the Scriptures*,[4] I tell it in political terms. The two volumes of *Searching the Scriptures* celebrate not only the centennial anniversary of the *Woman's Bible*, edited by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, but also the radical democratic religious vision[5] of Anna Julia Cooper,[6] as the twin roots of feminist biblical studies.[7] While the work of Cady Stanton is diminished by its focus on Anglo-Saxon elite wo/men or "Ladies," Cooper's work spells out a vision of solidarity and commitment "to make right every wrong":

> It is not the intelligent woman vs. the ignorant woman, nor the white woman vs. the black, the brown and the red, it is not even the cause of woman vs. man. Nay, it is woman's strongest vindication for speaking that the world needs to hear her voice. … Hers is every interest that has lacked an interpreter and a defender. Her cause is linked with that of every agony that has been

dumb—every wrong that needs a voice.[8]

In her recent book, *The Bible as Political Artifact*, Susanne Scholz argues that the feminist study of the Bible necessitates reading Scripture as a political artifact.[9] The Bible, read as a political artifact, she argues, "always indicates why things are ordered the way they are or, alternatively, how they could be ordered so that justice, peace, and the integrity of creation would prevail …."[10] For the theoretical explication of "artifact" Scholz refers to Langdon Winner, whose essay, "Do Artifacts Have Politics?,"[11] explains that artifacts embody social relations and distribute and enhance power, authority, and privilege "of some over others."[12] To Winner, artifacts are tools that are not neutral, apolitical entities. Rather, they "build order in our world,"[13] "structure decisions," and "establish a framework for public order that will endure over many generations."[14] In this sense, then, artifacts "correlate with particular kinds of political relationships," and so they are "inherently political."[15] I agree with Scholz that Winner's thesis sheds light on the conceptualization of the Bible as a "political artifact, a human-made construct that has been intimately immersed in, related to, and shaped by those societies in which biblical texts have been read, painted, filmed, talked about, shared, or even rejected."[16] However, I would add, biblical texts have not only been read and critically interpreted, but they also have been proclaimed, meditated on, and internalized as divine word.

Understanding the Bible as a political artifact helps us to analyze not only the Bible's historical content and literary form but also its religious-sacred power. It demands that we investigate how the Bible has shaped the social, economic, political, and religious order. It especially challenges biblical scholars to pay attention to the religious-ethical rhetoric and politics of the Bible. Therefore it is a particularly useful analytic concept for understanding the work that feminist biblical studies does. To tell the feminist story of the Bible as a political-religious artifact, I argue, needs to be told today in the context of neoliberal globalization, since the fundamentalist use of the Bible has legitimized the politics of neoliberal globalization. However, it was not feminism, as some argue, but the Western dualistic essentialized "masculine-feminine" gender framework understood not just as gender dualism but also gender hierarchy that has yoked segments of the women's movement to neoliberal globalization.[17] This framework "equalizes" or rather reduces the economic status of working class men to that of working class, single mothers, and poor wo/men, who could never rely on a "family wage." It was not the feminist campaign for equal pay and work conditions, as some have argued, but the political ideology of

neoliberalism that brought about this change. Hence, it is important to tell the story of feminist theory, history, and the*logy with respect to neoliberalism. For whatever stories about the feminist past we tell will shape not only our visions for its future, but also how we read the biblical artifact.

The Story of Feminist Biblical Studies (Part 1): Feminist Studies in Religion

Feminist studies in general and feminist biblical studies in particular emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s,[18] naming the oppressive powers at work in our world as *patriarchy*, which literally means "the rule of the father of the household" but was generally understood as the domination of men over wo/men.[19] However, this key category of feminist analysis was replaced by that of *gender* in the 1980s.[20] In distinction to the categories of *patriarchy* and *androcentrism* the category of *gender* no longer articulates intersectional[21] relations of domination. Whereas intersections of race, gender, class, colonialism, and other structures of oppression determine wo/men's lives, the category of gender articulates only one of these dehumanizations and it does not articulate their systemic interstructuredness. By replacing the central analytic feminist categories of *patriarchy* and *androcentrism* (male-centered ideology) with *gender*, the question of power relations has been muted and is often eclipsed.

The history of gender studies is not just a story important for feminism in the West but it is a story with global dimensions. It is important to note that gender studies arrived on the scene at the same time as neoliberal economic globalization and its academic discourses gained power and visibility around the world. The service industry of neoliberal globalization has not only exploited wo/men around the globe, but also reduced the economic power of working and middle class white men to that of working class and racialized wo/men, while at the same time promoting an ethos of aggressive masculinity.

In the 1970s, women's studies introduced the distinction between social gender roles and biological sex. By the mid-1980s, gender studies emerged alongside women's studies as a distinct field of inquiry. Its theory questions seemingly universal beliefs about wo/men and men and attempts to unmask the cultural, societal, and political roots of gender. It must not be overlooked that women's studies scholars first objected to the introduction of this analytic category because it no longer articulated that *wo/men as historical agents* were the focal point of feminist analysis. Thus, the transition from women's studies to gender studies is, according to Hemmings, "more likely institutionally supported where it is harnessed to globalization and seen as producing future gender

mainstreaming or gender and development experts."[22] In short, it is important to see that it was not feminism but the Western dualistic "masculine-feminine" framework of gender that has harnessed women's studies, including biblical women studies, to neoliberal globalization. Moreover, gender has become a key analytic category alongside race, class, age, colonialism, and other identity markers, a development that has led to an "adding up of oppressions,"[23] working alongside each other and constituting different dualistic frameworks of analysis. Finally, a feminist dualistic gender analytic has constituted the notion of diversity as an aggregate of such dualistic identity markers.

Insofar as feminist theory has revealed the gender encoding of all knowledge, feminist studies in religion have been able to show the gendering of religious knowledge and religious institutions as well as to problematize the second-class status of wo/men in most religions. However, while in my understanding, feminist studies in religion engage both wo/men and gender studies for their work, feminist studies are not identical with and cannot be limited to them. Rather, both feminist political theory and feminist biblical studies have to focus not merely on gender and wo/men but on issues of power and structures of domination, that is on the politics of *kyriarchal power*.[24]

The Story of Feminist Biblical Studies (Part 2): Feminist Biblical Studies

In line with Latin American liberation the*logy and German political the*logy of the 1970s as well as critical feminist theories of liberation in the past five decades, I have argued that feminist biblical studies have to be critical, dialogical, practical, and emancipatory. They have to be oriented not only towards the academy but also towards living communities of faith and/or struggle. Rather than just being beholden to the elite academic study of the biblical past, feminist biblical interpretation has to work for people in and outside organized religions who search for a spiritual vision of justice and love. In contrast to malestream liberation and political the*logies, I have maintained that an emerging emancipatory paradigm of interpretation needs to be first of all critical, approaching the text with a hermeneutics of suspicion. This frame has allowed me to articulate the goal of feminist biblical studies as political studies engendering biblical visions for emancipatory praxis.[25] Most importantly, I have sought to articulate this emancipatory goal not primarily in reaction to hegemonic biblical studies but in conversation with feminist, liberation the*logical, and postcolonial theories.[26]

Feminist biblical studies, I have argued, seeks not only to place the Bible into the hands of people who struggle for justice but also needs to explicitly take into account that biblical interpreters are not only gendered but also racialized, classed, and colonialized. Whereas ecclesiastical and academic biblical studies have excluded wo/men from the authoritative interpretation of the Bible throughout the centuries, liberationist biblical studies seek to enable and resource critical feminist readers who are able not only to understand biblical texts and interpretation, but also to critically evaluate them in the struggle for a more egalitarian democratic society and religious community.[27] It is the feminist liberation the*logical paradigm that first sought to shift the scholarly focus from the biblical texts to the community of interpretation.[28] It could do so because it connected with the religious-hermeneutical tradition and sharpened it by adding ideology-criticism to its repertoire, a move that called for an ethics of interpretation.

Feminist paradigm criticism is an important method for creating an alternative ethos/space from which to transform biblical studies. Paradigm

construction has developed a typology of shifting antagonistic practices that shape and determine the discipline of biblical studies and biblical interpretation on the whole. However, I have also argued for fruitful change to occur, the antagonistic rhetoric of paradigm change needs to be abandoned.

Thomas Kuhn,[29] the intellectual father of paradigm criticism, was certainly correct in observing that scientific paradigms arise in competition with each other and seek to replace each other. Looking at the history of the discipline of biblical studies, one can easily chart the field of biblical studies in such competitive terms. However, in the context of the emancipatory feminist paradigm, it seems more appropriate to chart paradigms as different scientific domains that correct and supplement each other. In other words, it is important to articulate paradigms not in combative but in collaborative terms. Paradigms can exist alongside each other, or they can be overlapping or remedial to each other. They can utilize each other's methodological approaches or they can work in corrective interaction with each other.

If one conceptualizes paradigms also in political and not only in disciplinary terms, one can integrate the spheres of the professional and the "ordinary" reader by delineating a paradigm as "a public intellectual sphere" where "citizen interpreters" come together to debate and discuss the Bible in terms of their own theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches, and spiritual interests. Such public spheres, including the academy, the church/synagogue, the school, and the individual, in which biblical studies are practiced are overlapping and not exclusive of each other. In order to communicate with each other, the "citizen interpreters" need to be clear not only about their different theoretical languages, but also about their different spiritual-ideological emphases and goals. By articulating paradigms as different and overlapping practices in the "public sphere," the dichotomizing tendencies that still haunt the discipline as well as minoritized criticism can be overcome.

In such a political frame, feminist biblical studies can be seen as creating a "radical democratic critical public space" from which to interact with and challenge the*logical, historical, and cultural academic biblical studies to transform their intellectual structures of exclusion and domination. The stress on ideology-critique and on the analysis of power enables feminist biblical studies to facilitate border exchanges with other disciplines.

However, feminist interpretation must not just be ideology critical but also constructive and visionary. It needs to articulate biblical visions of liberation and

well-being that foster religious identity formations and spiritual discourses which transform the internalized intersecting structures of domination. Feminist biblical interpretation has the task not only of tracing the cultural biblical artifact and its work of domination and emancipation but also of asking what *the biblical artifact does* to those who submit to its world of vision.

In order to pursue this task, feminist biblical studies needs to create the conditions for equal citizenship in its own public spheres. It can do so by articulating a theoretical platform capable of fostering critical and constructive exchanges and learnings between different approaches and groups that inhabit the diverse and ever-shifting space of feminist biblical interpretation. The inhabitants of this space need to pay careful attention to all the theoretical voices in their midst, avoid dualistic over and against constructions, and create common ground for the work of producing emancipatory radical democratic biblical knowledges.[30]

Feminist Analysis of Power (Part 1): Categories of Analysis

Since the early 1990s, the category of patriarchy and the dualistic category of gender has become increasingly unsatisfactory for a critical analysis of power. Hence, I have proposed the concept of kyriarchy as a new analytic category that could understand gender in terms of the interstructuredness of oppressions. This new analytic category is derived from the Greek words *kyrios* and *archein*. It refers to the rule and reign of the emperor, lord, slave master, father, husband, the free propertied male citizen of ancient democracy. This coinage of kyriarchy was indebted not only to my studies of the N*T and Greco-Roman antiquity, but also to my religious location in Catholicism, where the liturgical invocation *kyrie eleison* ("Lord have mercy!") is generally known because it is a frequent part of the liturgy. It is also an approximation of the German word *Herrschaft*, which is usually translated as domination, a translation derived from the Latin word *dominus*, which means "Lord." This neologism signals that gender must be understood in terms of intersecting structures of domination.

In short, kyriarchal democracies are stratified by shifting intersections of gender, race, class, religion, sexuality, ability, age, and other markers of domination. These intersections shape the *social-structural positions* that are assigned to us more or less by birth. Yet how people live these *structural kyriarchal* positions is conditioned not only by the structural positions themselves, but also by the *subject positions* through which we live them. Whereas an essentialist approach assigns to people an "authentic" identity that is derived from our *structural position*, one's *subject position* becomes coherent and compelling through political discourse, interpretive frameworks, and the development of theoretical horizons regarding domination. For Christians and other religious believers, religion and Sacred Scriptures play a key role in shaping such subject positions. Feminist scholars in religion, therefore, insist that religious texts and traditions must be re-interpreted in such a way that wo/men and other "nonpersons" achieve full citizenship in religion and society, gain full access to decision-making powers, and live out radical equality in community. We argue that differences of sex/gender, race, class, and ethnicity are socio-culturally constructed; they are not willed by G*d and therefore must be changed. G*d, who created people in the divine image, is to be found in and among people who are created equal.

In sum, a critical feminist theory articulates the subject of feminist struggles not on the basis of the essential difference of woman or of sociocultural gender differences. Rather, it does so in the interest of naming feminist subjects who struggle against neoliberal structures of domination.[31] Wo/men are not just gendered but also determined by race,[32] heteronormativity, class, or colonialism, as well as other markers of domination. Like those of gender, the social relations that give rise to theories of race, class, or ethnic differences are socio-culturally constructed as kyriarchal relations of domination. They are not biological givens.

Nineteenth-century scientists constructed the so-called "lower races"—lower-class wo/men, the sexually deviant, the criminal, the urban poor, and the insane—as biological "races apart." Their differences from the white male and their likeness to each other "explained" their lower position in the social hierarchy. In this scheme, the lower races represent the "feminine" aspect of the human species, and wo/men represent the "lower race" of gender. Thus, wo/men do not share a unitary essence but are multiple and fractured in many different ways by race, class, age, sexuality, ability, and gender. Hence, it is important to see gender as one among several structures of domination constructed to serve the division of power and wealth by sex, economics, race, culture, nationality, and religion.

A critical feminist theory and practice does not only destabilize the essentialist markers of *woman* and *gender*, but also those of hetero-normativity, race, class, colonialism, age, disability, and other markers of dehumanization. In short, a dualistic gender analysis does not suffice in biblical and religious studies because gender has been constructed in antiquity as kyriarchal in terms of the status of the freeborn lord (*kyrios*) or lady (*kyria*), and in modern times in terms of class, coloniality,[33] and race status. Consequently, an intersectional kyriarchal analysis is necessary.

Feminist Analysis of Power (Part 2): Intersectionality

The analytic object of feminist theory and the*logy as pointed out before is not simply "woman" or "gender" but the intersectionality[34] of domination, of kyriarchy, that is a sociopolitical and cultural-religious system of domination that structures the identity slots open to members of society in terms of race, gender, nation, age, economy, and sexuality. At the same time the analytic object of feminist theory and theology configures "woman" and "gender" as pyramidal relations of domination and submission, profit and exploitation. Kyriarchy is best theorized as a complex pyramidal system of intersecting multiplicative social and religious relations of superordination and subordination, of ruling and exploitation. Kyriarchal relations of domination are built on elite male property rights and the exploitation, dependency, inferiority, and obedience of wo/men.[35]

The Western kyriarchal system works simultaneously on four levels: the linguistic-symbolic level, the sociopolitical level, the ethical-cultural level, and the biological-natural level. They are intertwined and strengthen each other's power of domination. Diverse feminist approaches, such as womanist, queer, Latina, or postcolonial the*logies, work on different nodal sites of the intersecting discourse levels of kyriarchy and hence emphasize different aspects of the kyriarchal system.

Usually, intersectional theorists conceptualize such social and ideological structures of domination as *hierarchical* in order to map and make visible the complex interstructuring of the conflicting status positions of different wo/men. They understand neoliberal modes of gender exploitation as hierarchically structured. However, such a labeling of intersecting neoliberal global structures of domination as "hierarchical," "holy," and sacrosanct ascribes them to G*d or religion rather than to the agents of domination. Hence, it is important that, in the process of naming neoliberal domination, the concept of kyriarchy replaces the socio-analytic concept of hierarchy.

In short, a critical intersectional feminist analytic does not understand domination as an essentialist, ahistorical, and dualistic system. Instead, it articulates kyriarchy as a *heuristic* (derived from the Greek, meaning "to find") concept or as a diagnostic instrument that enables investigation into the multiplicative interactivity of gender, race, class, and imperial stratifications.

Such an analytic also needs to research kyriarchy's discursive inscriptions and ideological reproductions. Moreover, such an analytic highlights that people inhabit several shifting structural positions of race, sex, gender, class, and ethnicity, all at the same time. If one subject position of domination becomes privileged, it constitutes a nodal point. While at any particular historical moment, class or imperialism may be the primary modality through which one experiences class, imperialism, gender, and race, in other circumstances gender may be the privileged position through which one experiences sexuality, imperialism, race, and class.

QUILTING DEMOCRATICS

Insofar as neoliberal transnational kyriarchal capitalism crosses all borders, exploits all peoples, and colonizes all citizens, it requires a counter-vision and dissident strategy. Chela Sandoval formulates "democratics," a strategy and vision which has affinities with my effort to articulate the space of the *ekklēsia* of wo/men[36] as a critical radical democratic space of interpretation. Since the signifier "wo/man" is increasingly used by right-wing religions to draw exclusive boundaries, it is important to mark linguistically the difference between religion as kyriarchal institution and religion as *ekklēsia*, as the decision-making radical democratic congress of the people of G*d. Hence, *ekklēsia* is best understood as signifying a radical democratic congress of fully entitled, responsible decision-making citizens. As such it has never been fully realized either in Christian history or in Western democracy. Hence the expression *ekklēsia gynaikōn*, the *ekklēsia* of wo/men, functions as a linguistic means of conscientization.

Sandoval explains *democratics* as one of the methods of the oppressed in the following way:

> With the transnationalization of capitalism when elected officials are no longer leaders of singular nation-states but nexuses for multinational interests, it also becomes possible for citizen-subjects to become activists for a new decolonizing global terrain, a psychic terrain that can unite them with similarly positioned citizen-subjects within and across national borders into new, post-Western–empire alliances …. Love as social movement is enacted by revolutionary, mobile, and global coalitions of citizen-activists who are allied through the apparatus of emancipation.[37]

Although I appreciate Sandoval's vision of the democratics as "a new decolonizing global terrain," I am hesitant to claim "love" as the *sole*

revolutionary force or to reduce "oppositional social action only to a mode of 'love' in the postmodern world."[38] I am well aware that numerous 2/3rd World feminists in the United States have eloquently written about the power of love in struggles for justice,[39] but I cannot forget the function of "romantic love" either in the oppression of wo/men or in the anti-Jewish valorization of the "N*w"[40] Testament "G*d of Love" over the "Old" Testament "God of Justice." Democratics, in my view, must be equally informed by justice, as Patricia Hill Collins suggests:

> Justice transcends Western notions of equality grounded in sameness and uniformity. … In making their quilts Black women weave together scraps of fabric from all sorts of places. Nothing is wasted, and every piece of fabric has a function and a place in a given quilt. … [T]hose who conceptualize community via notions of uniformity and sameness have difficulty imagining a social quilt that is simultaneously heterogeneous, driven toward excellence, and just.[41]

In this image of quilt and quilting for the making of justice, the decolonizing practices of a global democratics, of the *ekklēsia* of wo/men, and a critical feminist dissident global interpretation converge.

In short, a critical-rhetorical understanding of interpretation investigates and reconstructs the discursive arguments of a text, its socio-religious location, and its diverse interpretations in order to underscore the text's possible oppressive as well as liberative performative values, and possibilities in ever-changing historical-cultural situations. It understands the Bible and biblical interpretation as a site of struggle over authority, values, and meaning. Since the socio-historical location of rhetoric is the public of the *polis*, this rhetorical-emancipatory approach seeks to situate biblical scholarship in such a way that its public character and political responsibility become an integral part of its contemporary readings and historical reconstructions of the biblical artifact. It insists on an ethical radical democratic imperative that compels biblical scholarship to contribute to the advent of a society and religion that are free from all forms of kyriarchal inequality and exploitation.

Toward Critical Political Biblical Studies (Part 1): Speaking with an Emancipatory Accent

The conceptualization of feminist emancipatory biblical studies as a critical quilting of meaning in different socio-political locations enables us not only to deconstruct the kyriarchal ideological inscriptions of the biblical past but also to articulate a biblical spirituality and emancipatory vision of justice and well-being for all. To transform the past of biblical studies, one needs to chart the emancipatory paradigm of biblical studies as a new field of inquiry. If the biblical past should have a future, this paradigm must be emancipatory, since its task is not just postmodern ideological deconstruction but also the production of spiritual emancipatory knowledge of re-vision and re-memory. Such a critical feminist emancipatory paradigm requires a change of the following three areas of biblical studies: (1) the the*logical understanding of scripture, (2) the reading of kyriarchal texts, and (3) the conceptualization of history.

First, an emancipatory paradigm must relinquish both the apologetic defense of the Bible and the critical scholarly disinterest in the*logical interpretation. It has to wrestle the*logically with the understanding of the Bible as divine revelation and with the estimation of the Bible as a cultural classic to be approached with a hermeneutic of appreciation and trust rather than a hermeneutics of suspicion. Hence, it is important to transform the doctrinal-cultural paradigm of authority and to define scripture the*logically not as a dogmatic archetype but as a the*logical prototype open for transformation. Whether biblical scholars are religious believers or not, we have to wrestle with the Bible not only as a historical and political artifact but also as Scripture and to articulate emancipatory interpretations of biblical texts because millions of disenfranchised wo/men still read the Bible searching for visions of hope and strength in the struggles against the dehumanizing powers of neoliberalism.

Because of its ideological inscriptions, the Bible as Scripture and as cultural-political artifact must be approached not only with a hermeneutics of suspicion and evaluation but also with a hermeneutics of imagination, remembrance, and transformation. Reinterpreting a long the*logical tradition that found its way into Vatican II's writings, I insist on an emancipatory specification of revelation. Rather than to rely on a "canon within the canon" approach, I have argued that a

critical feminist emancipatory paradigm also has the the*logical task of exploring what G*d wanted to put into Sacred Scripture for the sake of our, i.e. wo/men's, salvation or well-being. In other words, kyriarchal texts and histories have no truth claims as legitimators of oppression. Indeed, they must be critically analyzed and evaluated in their socio-political contexts if G*d's salvific intention should be "revealed" in the process of interpretation. Whether biblical scholars of the emancipatory paradigm are believers or not, we have to analyze the the*logical rhetoric of Scripture in its different socio-cultural and religious contexts.

Second, the emancipatory paradigm of biblical studies has to confront the power of biblical language. In a grammatically androcentric and kyriocentric (lord/master) centered language system, wo/men always have to think twice and to deliberate whether we are meant or not when we are told, for example, that "all men are created equal" or that we are "sons of G*d." Religious-biblical language tells us that we are made in the image of G*d, who is generally portrayed as male. When reading the Bible as Sacred Scripture or as a Western cultural classic, wo/men internalize not only that the Divine is male and not female but also that wo/men are second-class citizens subordinated to male authority. Simply by learning to speak or to pray, wo/men learn that we are marginal and insignificant "second-class members" of society and religion.

It seems to me, therefore, that only those 2/3rd World feminist scholars who have not been socialized into a Western andro-kyriocentric language system and whose language systems are not gendered in the same way can break the power of biblical male-centered language. Only scholars who have grown up in such different language systems are able to make significant contributions to feminist emancipatory translation, thought, and the*logy. Critical feminist emancipatory research is still very much lacking such work, and it promises to become a very fecund area of study in the emancipatory fourth paradigm.[42]

Third, the civil rights movement and other liberation movements around the globe have argued that it is a sign of oppression not to have a written history. Hence, the rewriting and re-conceptualization of "His-story" in a different key was and is an essential task for emancipation and liberation. Historiography in general and biblical history in particular have to relinquish antiquarian moorings and elite orientation. Such work has to recover history as memory and re-membrance. In writing *In Memory of Her*,[43] I tried to do just that. I was not so much interested in writing woman's history in Early Christianity but to write Early Christian history in a feminist key. I explored whether our sources allow us to frame Early Christian history so that not merely men but also wo/men are

remembered as central actors in and shapers of early Christian communities and as articulators of a religious vision. Since the story we tell about origins and beginnings shapes our identity, I continue to argue that it is necessary to tell early Christian history differently. I thus proposed a model of struggle that moves between shifting egalitarian relations on the one hand and kyriarchal dominations on the other.

My book *In Memory of Her* is often read in terms of the Protestant model of "pure" beginnings and rapid deterioration into patriarchy. However, such a reading is a misreading because it does not grasp the historiographical and political model of struggle undergirding the arguments of my book. These struggles did not end in the second century CE but they are still with us today, shaping not only Christian but also Western history. In contrast to some postmodern literary theorists who eschew the writing of history as "what must be remembered," I believe that it is important to change historical biblical studies in the interest of liberation/emancipation if the biblical past is to have a feminist emancipatory future.

Rather than re-inscribing the disciplinary divisions between the*logical and scientific interpretation, between literary and historical methods, between socio-political and religious approaches, or between social-sociological and ideological–religious criticism, I continue to argue that critical feminist emancipatory studies must work for a paradigm shift that can overcome these dualisms by conceptualizing biblical studies as a rhetorics and ethics of inquiry and transformation. To conceptualize the emancipatory paradigm of biblical studies as a rhetorics of inquiry and ethics of transformation would engender research in the following areas of interpretation that constitute the fourth emancipatory paradigm:

1. A hermeneutics of experience: global experience and socio-political-religious location of the subjects of biblical knowledge.
2. A hermeneutics of domination: a systemic structural socio-political analysis of the rhetorical and historical situation.
3. A hermeneutics of suspicion: an ideology and language critique, a critique of method and epistemology, cultural and literary criticism, as well as a critique of religion and the*logy.
4. A hermeneutics of evaluation: the ethical and the*logical evaluation of texts and interpretations as to how they serve global domination or equality and well-being.
5. A hermeneutics of imagination: the cultivation of the interpretive

scholarly imagination and ritualization of texts and traditions to create the "other worlds" that we desire and strive for.

6. A hermeneutics of historical remembrance: the rewriting of biblical history as emancipatory historical reconstruction, as memory and heritage in the struggle for liberation and well-being.
7. A hermeneutics of transformation: the critical praxis of change and transformation in a global world of domination.

These seven areas of feminist emancipatory research require transdisciplinary collaboration and the formulation of new methods of inquiry.

At the same time, these seven areas of research require translation into a practical pedagogical guide for interpretation. I have formulated and developed the Dance of Interpretation that encompasses the following hermeneutical steps: a hermeneutics of experience, a hermeneutics of domination, a hermeneutics of suspicion, a hermeneutics of evaluation, a hermeneutics of imagination, a hermeneutics of historical remembrance, and a hermeneutics of transformation. This dance script can easily be activated through common sense questions put to the text and to ourselves.[44]

Toward Critical Political Biblical Studies (Part 2): Combating Neoliberalism to Recover a Religious Language of Hope

With these seven steps of the interpretive "dance," a critical feminist interpretation for liberation facilitates conscientization and cultural, social, religious, and disciplinary transformation in the age of neoliberal devastations. A critical feminist interpretation seeks to provide intellectual and spiritual resources to biblical readers, whether they are biblical scholars or citizen-readers, to combat the spirit of neoliberalism. Such a critical feminist interpretation seeks to provide the intellectual means for such work in this age of exploitation. Feminist emancipatory scholarly and citizen-based reading practices articulate rhetorics, methods, and ethics of inquiry for the emancipatory feminist work of changing not only academic biblical studies but also of making conscious the all-consuming rhetoric of the neoliberal regime. The work of a critical feminist biblical interpretation for liberation is increasingly important but exceedingly difficult in the face of global neoliberal exploitation and the hostile corporate takeover of both the commonwealth of the nations and of higher education not only in North America but also around the globe.

As Henry Giroux details in his book *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education*,[45] the hostile takeover of education by corporate market forces with its vicious and predatory excesses is in the process of undermining democratic processes and of radically reshaping the mission and practices of higher education. It reduces human values and experiences to data that can be measured and monetized in the capitalist marketplace. Neoliberalism's multipronged assault produces cultural illiteracy, denies the resources for democratic collaboration, reduces human values and learning to that which can be measured, and undermines higher education's ability to foster values like caring for each other. The values and mindsets of neoliberalism's agenda are practiced every semester with a "shopping" period during which professors have to advertise their wares to attract student consumers who at the end of the semester evaluate the products purchased.

The ramifications of neoliberal marketization of social assets and values are also detailed in Saskia Sassen's upsetting and frightening book *Expulsions*.[46] Her core hypothesis is "that the move from Keynesian economics to the global era of

privatization, deregulation, and open borders for some, entailed a switch from dynamics that brought people in to dynamics that push people out."[47] The world that was built in the twentieth century after the devastating genocide and starvation of the Second World War she argues, was driven by "a logic of inclusion," by efforts of bringing minorities and the poor into the political and economic mainstream. However, at the end of the century the Keynesian nation-based project of building a just society began to give way to two neoliberal shifts across the world in the 1980s. The first shift required the global outsourcing of manufacturing services, clerical work, harvesting of human organs, and the raising of unregulated crops as well as the active making of global cities as strategic spaces that function as a new geography of austerity cutting across the old East/West and North/South divisions. The second shift produced the ascendance of finance in the network of global cities. As a consequence, it economically impoverished and excluded of people who have ceased to be valued as consumers and workers. Hence, governments saw a need to reduce government debt, social welfare programs, and government regulations of the markets. Sassen explains: "Anything or anybody, whether a law or a civic effort, that gets in the way of profit risks being pushed aside—expelled."[48] This development has now climaxed with Trumpism in the United States. It threatens to tear apart the social fabric and to subvert all human rights and democratic processes. Fundamentalist religion has played and will play a significant role in the ideological neoliberal takeover.

Since neoliberalism has enlisted religious fundamentalisms for promoting its goals, feminist and other emancipatory biblical studies have become very important in the struggle against the dehumanizing mindsets, lies, and ideologies of neoliberalism. However, I do not see a concerted effort to address the overall impact of neoliberalism's antidemocratic market forces. Some efforts attempt to respond to single issues as for instance gay marriage or the impoverishment of children, but not much is done about the biblical foundations of social responsibility in a neoliberal age and its implications for biblical studies. Giroux points the way to such a critical constructive response:

> This is about more than reclaiming the virtues of dialogue, exchange and translation. It is about recovering a politics and inventing a language that can create democratic public squares in which new subjects and identities can be produced that are capable of recognizing and addressing the plight of the other and struggling collectively to expand and deepen the struggle for justice, freedom and democratization. … We need a language of hope, one that is realistic rather than romantic about the challenges the planet is facing and yet electrified by a realization that things can be different, that possibilities can not only be imagined but engaged, fought for, and realized in collective struggles.[49]

Seen in this light, the task of feminist biblical interpretation is to recover the Bible as a political artifact not only for indicting neoliberal structures of dehumanization, but also for recovering a democratic-religious language of hope, dignity, and love.

CONCLUSION

I want to end with a quote of Melissa Harris-Perry who evokes the power of religion in a speech at the *Take Back the American Dream Conference* in Washington, D.C. She argues that racism, anti-immigrant panic, and the war on women drive contemporary U.S. politics. She refers to the faith of her grandmother who was sold as a slave to tell us "not to be afraid of each other," stating:

> What I do know is that my enslaved grandmother who was sold on a street corner in Richmond, Virginia, believed in God. Now, I'm not asking you to believe in God; I'm asking you to think about this: This is a woman who never knew anything but slavery for herself, never knew anything but slavery for everyone she'd ever been related to, never expected anything but slavery for all of the people she would be related to in the future. There was no empirical evidence that any being cared about her circumstances. There was no empirical evidence that there was a loving God who had any power. And if there was a loving God, he was pretty pitiful, or if he was powerful, he didn't seem to love her.

This statement gestures toward the task of feminist biblical interpretation in the age of neoliberal Trumpism that threatens global survival. Harris-Perry goes on to say:

> I'm not asking you to believe in God or to accept any kind of supreme being. I'm asking you to think about the faith that is associated with the hope that is not necessarily rooted in the empirical realities you see around you right at this moment, that says that we can still be part of something that is bigger than ourselves, and something that we cannot necessarily see at the moment, but simply requires us not to be afraid of each other. Because it's our fear of each other that makes us exceptionally easy to divide.[50]

Feminist interpretation of the biblical artifact must seek to find scriptural resources to strengthen this call.

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[1] Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

[2] See also Ann Oakley, *Sex, Gender, and Society* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1972); Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Patriarchy," in Lisa Isherwood and Dorothea McEwan, eds., *An A to Z of Feminist Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 173–4; Sylvia Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy* (Oxford: Basil, 1990); Ernst Bornemann, *Das Patriarchat—Ursprung und Zukunft unseres Gesellschaftssystems* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1991); Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour* (New York, NY: Palgrave, 1999); Lorraine Code, "Patriarchy," in Lorraine Code, ed., *Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories* (London: Routledge, 2000), 378–9; Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination* (trans. Richard Nice; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001).

[3] By feminist interpretation I mean a critical feminist interpretation for liberation. I elaborate on this understanding in "Feminist Theology as a Critical Theology of Liberation," *Theological Studies* 36.4 (1975): 605–26 which was reprinted in *Woman: New Dimensions*, ed. Walter Burghardt (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1977), 29–50; *Mission Trends* 4 (1979): 188–216; *Churches in Struggle: Liberation Theologies and Social Change in North America*, ed. William K. Tabb, 46–66 (New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 1986).

[4] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ed., *Searching the Scriptures* (2 Vols.; New York, NY: Crossroad, 1993, 1994). Yvonne Sherwood, ed. The Bible and Feminism: Remapping the Field (New York: Oxford, 2018).

[5] See Karen Baker-Fletcher, *A Singing Something: Womanist Reflections on Anna Julia Cooper* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1994).

[6] See my book *Sharing Her Word: Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Context* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1998), 50–74.

[7] The Woman's Caucus Religious Studies recovered the Woman's Bible; see Judith Plaskow and Jean Arnold Romero, eds., *Women and Religion* (rev. ed.; Missoula, MT: Working Group on Women and Religion and Scholars Press, 1984). The black feminist political context of this work of women in religion is expressed by the Combahee River Collective. See Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2017) celebrating the Black Feminism of the Combahee River Collective and their manifesto published in 1977. Hence, it is more than surprising to read the following statement in the introduction of Gay L. Byron and Vanessa Lovelace, eds., *Womanist Interpretation of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 8: "[W]omanism and black feminism are not interchangeable …. They 'favor' each other … but in contrast to womanism, feminism is still generally regarded as the 'universal' experience of white women." This statement rejects the radical tradition of political black feminism that is not only aware of race and gender but also of class and imperialism. In this time of Trumpian racism and xenophobia, it is important to discuss the political roots and implications of our work.

[8] Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South* (1892); republished in *The Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers* (New York, NY; Oxford University Press, 1988), 122.

[9] Susanne Scholz, *The Bible as a Political Artifact: On the Feminist Study of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017).

[10] Ibid., xv–xvi. For details on these theological principles, see, e.g., D. Preman Niles, "Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation," *WCC Ecumenical Dictionary* (November 2003); available at http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/who/dictionary-article11.html. See also his monograph entitled *Between the Flood and the Rainbow: Interpreting the Conciliar Process of Mutual Commitment (Covenant) to Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation* (Geneva, WI: WCC Publications, 1992).

[11] Langdon Winner, "Do Artifacts Have Politics?," *Daedalus* 109.1 (Winter 1980): 121–36.

[12] Ibid., 125.

[13] Ibid., 127.

[14] Ibid., 128.

[15] Ibid., 123.

[16] Scholz, *The Bible as a Political Artifact*, xx.

[17] See my book *Congress of Wo/men: Religion, Gender and Kyriarchal Power* (Cambridge, MA: FSR Books, 2017).

[18] A first attempt of telling the story of feminist biblical studies in the twentieth century has been made by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ed., *Feminist Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century: Scholarship and Movement* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2014).

[19] I write wo/men in this broken fashion in order to make visible that persons marked as "wo/men" do not have an essence in common and are extremely diverse. Additionally, I speak of wo/men in order to combat gendered language that uses men but not wo/men as an inclusive generic marker, as well as to indicate that the status of wo/men also defines that of subordinated and exploited men in neoliberal times.

[20] See Mary Holmes, *What is Gender? Sociological Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), and also my book entitled *Jesus, Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (New York, NY: Continuum, 1995), 34–42.

[21] Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2016).

[22] Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, 10–11.

[23] See the excellent and clear contribution of Barbara J. Riesman, "Gender as Social Structure: Theory

Wrestling with Activism," in Joan Z. Spade and Catherine G. Valentine, eds., *The Kaleidoscope of Gender: Prisms, Patterns, and Possibilities* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publishers, 2007), 9–21.

[24] See my books *Democratizing Biblical Studies: Toward an Emancipatory Educational Space* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009) and *Empowering Memory and Movement: Thinking and Working Across Borders* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014).

[25] See my books *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2000) and *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007).

[26] See my book *Transforming Vision: Explorations in Feminist The*logy* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011).

[27] For the Roman Catholic context of feminist struggles, see my book *Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ekkleia-logy of Liberation* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing, 1993).

[28] I prefer interpretation over reading since all wo/men can interpret stories and biblical texts but not all wo/men can read. See my book *Changing Horizons: Exploration in Feminist Interpretation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012).

[29] Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (third ed.; Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

[30] For such work, see my books *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1992); *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (New York, NY: Orbis Books, 2001).

[31] See Jutta Sommerbauer, *Differenzen zwischen Frauen: Zur Positionsbestimming und Kritik des postmodernen Feminismus* (Münster: Unrast, 2003).

[32] Eske Wollrad, *Weißsein im Widerspruch: Feministische Perspektiven auf Rassismus, Kultur und Religion* (Königstein / Taunus: Ulrike Helmer Verlag, 2005).

[33] For this concept, see Maria Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial Modern Gender System," *Hypatia* 22.1 (2007): 186–209; "Toward a Decolonial Feminism," *Hypatia* 25.4 (2010): 742–59. See also Reina Lewis and Sara Mills, eds., *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (London / New York, NY: Routledge, 2003).

[34] See especially Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2016); and also my introduction to Laura Nasrallah and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, eds., *Prejudice and Christian Beginnings: Investigating Race, Gender and Ethnicity in Early Christian Studies* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009), 1–26; Gabriele Winker and Nina Degele, *Intersektionalität: Zur Analyse sozialer Ungleichheiten* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2009); Helma Lutz, Marie Theresa Herrera Vivar, and Linda Supik, eds., *Fokus Intersektionalität: Bewegungen und Verortungen eines vielschichtigen Konzepts* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2010); Sharon Doetsch-Kidder, *Social Change and Intersectional Activism* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[35] I write wo/man with a slash to indicate that the word is understood to signify all those who are subordinated and exploited. Hence, wo/men includes also such a man, but it does not signify "lady."

[36] For an excellent critical discussion of this concept, see Janine Jobling, *Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Theological Context: Restless Readings* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2002) 32–60; 142–63.

[37] Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 183.

[38] Ibid. 183.

[39] To name just a few, see, e.g., Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Toni Morrison, Cornel West, June Jordan,

Gloria Anzaldúa, Maria Lugones, Merle Woo, or Alice Walker.

[40] Here the asterisk draws attention to the danger of supersessionism in the label “New Testament.”

[41] Patricia Hill Collins, *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 248–9.

[42] See, however, the very interesting article of Satoko Yamaguchi, “Father Image of G*d and Inclusive Language: A Reflection in Japan,” in *Toward a New Heaven and a New Earth: Essays in Honor of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza*, ed. Fernando Segovia (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 199–224. We need much more such intercultural research on biblical translation and interpretation in non-androcentric language contexts.

[43] See my book *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1983).

[44] For an example of the hermeneutical dance with a scriptural text, see my study guide: *1 Peter: Reading against the Grain* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 62–77.

[45] Henry Giroux, *Neoliberalism’s War on Higher Education* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2014).

[46] Saskia Sassen, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

[47] Ibid., 211.

[48] Ibid., 213.

[49] Giroux, *Neoliberalism’s War on Higher Education*, 204.

[50] This is a transcript of a speech delivered at the “Take Back the American Dream” conference, produced by the “Campaign for America’s Future,” located in Washington, D.C., on June 18, 2012. Available online at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qRc-slwNJUo.

CHAPTER 2

THE BIBLE AND HUMAN RIGHTS FROM A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

CAROLE R. FONTAINE

HUMAN rights refer to a body of rights, and concomitant duties, that belong to all human beings by their membership in the species of *Homo sapiens*, without regard to any distinction of sex, race, class, age, legality, nationality, religion, gender orientation, ability, or state of health. Such rights are presumed to be universal and inalienable. Although various cultures may differ concerning the origin and specificity of these rights, all governing states are expected to secure them for their citizens. Often, it is easier to understand human rights (or more precisely, their *enjoyment*) in their negative statement: humans ought *not* to be enslaved, used for sex, or be subjected to genocide; humans ought *not* to be tortured, or harvested for food or body parts; civilians, hospitals, and prisoners should *not* to be targeted in wars, and so on. Each negative formulation argues for a positive "right" which is being violated: right to life, right to bodily integrity, dignity, food, or safety. While societies may enumerate these rights differently, since ancient times all groups have proposed a view of what constitutes a common good for human life. However, as noted below, that vision of a common good was never actually extended to humanity.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (UDHR)

From such a *jus cogens* (a form of law akin to religious concepts of *natural law* —known through reason and observation rather than promulgation), modern legal and philosophical discourse has distilled a basic set of rights which, in theory, apply universally and are now gathered in the *United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR). While earlier covenants on rights, often derived from conduct in war, preceded the UDHR, in 1948 this groundbreaking work brought together the nations of the world in the aftermath of the devastation and genocides of the Second World War. Fueled with a sense of enhanced urgency in the face of the past horrors and new threats of nuclear war, thinkers from different world cultures, religions, and disciplines came together to review the best of humanity's thoughts and practices for securing peace on a global, national, and even personal level in a hard-fought quest for a truly inclusive document. The UDHR has proved durable as a "user's manual" of best practices for the human race, inviting societies, groups, and peoples to measure themselves against its targets. It should be noted, however, that the signatories to the UDHR are only *urged* to comply with its mandates; the treaty itself has no measures of enforcement. For some, this renders the UDHR a lovely abstraction, but scarcely one with which any state feels obligated to comply. Despite moral sanctions, the international community of human rights advocates and agencies usually rely on public exposure of abuses and concomitant shame on the part of those who commit them. Objectively, it hardly seems that commission of heinous acts (crimes against humanity) or broad human rights violations present any particular bar to holding public office, seizing power, or retaining it. Much needs to be done in growing the world's moral conscience to extend it beyond one's own family, group, nation, and region. The UDHR, for all its problems, still presents a viable roadmap for evolution into a cooperative, healthy world.

"ESC": Rights in Three Tiers

The UDHR outlines rights in three basic sets. First, personal liberties are set forth in the first nineteen articles (right to life, freedom of thought, speech, and religion; freedom to marry; right to geographic movement; etc.), principles owing much of their origin to the European Enlightenment. Second, articles 20–26 deal with economic rights (right to work, right to time off, right to safe working conditions, etc.) and grew out of the Industrial Revolution and the struggles of trade unions. Third, articles 27–28 owe their origin to socialist movements. These rights emphasize community and nation as sources of

affiliation which play a role for the good in human social life.[1] These interlocking sets of rights can be imagined as lodged in the individual and family (articles 1–19), moving out into their nested placement within economic settings (articles 20–26), which in turn are contextualized within a community/region/state/nation (articles 27–28). The three groups of rights are commonly referred to as ESC, economic, social, and cultural rights (the ESC in agencies like UNESCO). All rights must be enjoyed *together* for experience of the fullness of a common good, and a society will flourish only to the extent that its people are empowered to do so. This is the vision toward which a "global ethic" should set its path.

Problems in the Human Rights Model

The acceptance of a universal concept of human rights continues to unfold today. Since the UDHR is situated in human experience, it is subject to amendment as it moves through time as issues change. For instance, the communist threat to "freedom of religion" during the twentieth-century Cold War has yielded to worries about global security, especially during mass migrations. Even at the time of promulgation, strong disagreements existed between signatories based on different religious, political, or cultural practices. Conversion to other religions, inheritance for daughters, female consent for and minimum age for marriage were stumbling blocks for Islamic states; communist nations balked at freedom of speech and freedom to worship. South Africa protested in order to keep Apartheid, and the racially segregated U.S.A. could not tolerate the idea of interracial marriage, a touchstone issue which actually masked a whole series of rights abuses toward African American citizens.[2] As time passed, some of these issues found tentative resolution, but more problems were unveiled. The United Nations has not proved to be the robust institution for adjudicating global conflict that many had hoped in the postwar era; global poverty, human trafficking, mass migration, and global warming in the age of diminishing carbon fuel have posed problems and questions that will continue to challenge the flexibility of the human rights paradigm. Yet, there has never been a time when the planet is more in need of a global ethic.

Western Biases in Human Rights Discourse

One major problem posed by critics of the human rights approach is its origin in Western colonial hegemony, which routinely used issues of "civilization" as an ideological weapon in its quest for power and resources. Other cultures ask, and rightly so, if the predominance of Western historical influences in human rights documents and history (Greek and Roman law, biblical and Jewish legal traditions, Christian ethics, medieval scholasticism, Magna Carta, Covenant on the Rights of Man, Geneva Conventions, etc.) does not make human rights discourse into an indelible tool for advancing Western conquest and economic domination. If so, then the indigenous ethics of peoples whose social, economic, and cultural traditions operate differently will *ipso facto* be judged inferior. In particular, the emphasis on the more modern personal "political" freedoms of the *individual* run counter to the "group ethic" of solidarity that permeates Asian philosophy, Islamic societies and traditions, and socialist countries. The first set of rights in the UDHR not only seem to present a point-for-point Cold War statement against communist praxis, but are also ideally suited to urge non-Western countries to participate in a robber-baron capitalism that decimates the normal group ethics of their societies. Any objection may then be judged as "backward" and "anti-trade."

Similarly, in light of the post–September 11 "Global War on Terror," the United States' sudden interest in human rights issues in Muslim-majority countries seems highly suspect due to that nation's considerable tolerance for despotic crimes against humanity perpetrated by Islamic dictators who remain favorable to U.S. strategic goals. Particularly thorny are issues of "religious freedom" which rise to the level of political action: it is clear from multiple analyses that the "freedoms" being invoked there are anything but universal![3] In fact, religious freedom is far more likely to mask a clear cultural imperative to protect one's own "proper" religion from someone else's "wrong" religion, particularly active around issues of gender. This situation is hardly what the UDHR envisioned. Although the "cultural rights" section of the UDHR is the least well developed of all the categories of rights, a situation which exists throughout the UN-system at large.[4] When the tenets of in-group "freedom of religion" are directed at ethnic or religious minorities, female empowerment, or those who are other than heterosexual, a clear departure from the human rights goals has been taken in favor of using the tool of "rights" discourse to restrict and in extreme cases even deny others' right to life.

HUMAN RIGHTS: RELIGIOUS OR HUMANIST?

Depending on whether one thinks that human rights are an entirely humanist project (so-called human rights "minimalists") or deeply rooted in a religious world view (human rights "maximalists"),[5] no one can deny the historical impact of the biblical tradition on the development of human rights discourse in the West.[6] For maximalists, the ancient teachings about human life, its value and destiny, found in the Bible are often thought to be an indispensable underpinning for the pursuit of the realization of the goals of modern human rights discourse and activism. However, while there are significant areas of contact in terms of content and desirable outcomes, both approaches to humanity's well-being share significant differences in terms of their origin and key beliefs about the nature of human worth and dignity.

Said differences extend into the arenas of where supporting "laws" should be applied and who should enforce them in order to achieve "universal" goals: the Bible lodges the demands of righteousness toward one's neighbor in the community and individual believer. Modern human rights discourse looks to state actors to implement policy for *groups*, rather than individuals. In practice, both sets of approaches—biblical and modern legal discourse about rights—are often at direct odds with each other as they interact with a plethora of modern issues. These include, but are not limited to: state sovereignty versus individual choice, group versus individual rights, cultural differences versus hegemony of so-called human "universals," ancient versus modern understandings of "the person," "group," or "state." These conflicts become particularly pointed when they intersect with concerns of pressing global significance such as the right to economic development and growth, global security, protection of the environment (climate change), human trafficking, freedom of religion, understanding of human sexual differences, frontiers of medical experimentation, and population management. Nevertheless, it is both possible and necessary that each set of approaches and concerns interrogate and enhance the other. Such interaction leads to a broader and more complete pharmacopeia of methods for easing human ills and creating a greater good, especially in a globalized, interdependent world at risk. It might also be noted that as humanity sets its face toward exploring—and exploiting!—other environments beyond our own planet, it would be prudent to develop a genuinely inclusive way to think about worth and dignity of life which might expand to include other habitats and forms of life beyond those we currently know.

THE PROBLEM OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN HUMAN

Rights Discourse: A Feminist Assessment

Pressing global threats create an imperative for finding ways in which groups may work across boundaries to value all life on the planet. Among other things, this requires systems of thought and action where the worth and dignity of women and children are held as dearly as that of men. As noted above, *no* culture has ever managed to extend its view of "rights" to the totality of its population: the invariable groups who were denied full participation as humans in their communities are women (and their children), slaves or indentured servants, and non-heterosexuals.[7] Other groups, varying by culture, might also find themselves excluded: migrants, ethnic or religious minorities, the disabled, and so on, but our discussion here will concentrate on the situation for women as full possessors of human worth and dignity. These omissions in the groups "covered" by human rights promulgations are hardly trivial. If we suppose that females constitute roughly half of the world's population at any given time, and those other than heterosexual account for about 10 to 15 percent of the general population, then even without being able to calculate the amount of people held as slaves or in perpetual servitude, we can surmise that, at any given time, well over half the world's population was excluded from consideration as participants in the "good life."

Religious Devaluation

The devaluation of women and children as moral beings and agents in the majority of world nations and religions has been well documented in scholarship and ethnological studies. Sadly, it can be shown that the human rights of women and children are held as second-class in importance to the "rights of *Man*" in *every* setting, whether ancient or modern, religious or secular, theological or legal. In particular, the asymmetrical religious doctrines of women's sinfulness along with children's status as property in the patriarchal household have both left their imprint on law and norms concerning the worth and full personhood of women and children under secular law. Classical philosophy—important to us here because that is where minimalists locate the origin of secular human rights discourse—has done no better: its own unfavorable analysis of the personhood and rights of women often betrays even more bias than the biblical and religious materials in question.[8] The outcome is that the rights of Woman and her

offspring have been easily dismissed as inferior in importance to almost any other consideration in the matter at hand by those (elite in-group males) making decisions. The generally accepted principle of "progressive realization" of human rights goals, where more pressing issues are given precedence, allows gender issues to be assigned low priority for implementation.

Philosophical Devaluation

In the West, binary thinking has preferred to consider the world between the dual poles of mind and body where, for lovers of knowledge (*philosophia*), the mind/spirit takes pride of place as both the subject studied, and the tool by which that study is conducted (through the medium of language (*logos*) in antiquity). When Man names himself as mind, Woman is assigned to the lesser position of body/matter.[9] After all, she is not only the source of new bodies, she is a pernicious reminder to men of their own bodily desires and needs throughout their entire life cycle. For those who would see themselves as disembodied minds that order their worlds, it is something of a comedown to experience the cravings of the embodied self that women supply, from a clean diaper, to dinner, to sex, to hospice care. Women chain men to earth in ways that violate their socially nurtured desires for authority and agency. Disappearing them is no answer; dinner must still be served.

For all these murky reasons, the category of "Woman" in male philosophy has most often been associated with nature—a raw resource which is wild, untamed, in need of male rationality to control and harness its monstrous powers. Man, on the other hand, has been associated with culture—rationality, the intellectual creation of meaning, norms, and all that is "human." Men make history, Women make babies, food, and clothing.[10] Children are, like their mothers, wild and uncivilized. Male culture requires women to transform babies into rational, orderly citizens so that boys might move into the male public world created by the intellect and its devices. Girls, by contrast, are destined to join the private world of unpaid sexual slaves and household drudges through marriage or prostitution. Hence, the concerns of men and their institutions are posed as priority issues for the success and evolution of culture (as defined by male elites in the system), and so must *naturally* subsume those of women and children, who exist to service and extend the patriarchal family. Appeals to the sanctity of the "family" as the "natural" economic and spiritual foundation of most of the world's cultures actually mask the concerns of extending male privilege and

comfort into the future. Appeals to the "traditional" family reinforce the exclusion of those other than heterosexual from full human participation, soothing male fears of unruly sexuality by invoking "religious freedom" to impose supposed normativity.[11] This move also reframes egoistic desires for personal power as both continuity of tradition, and/or progress to a new and better order! Where philosophy and family customs have shaped legal traditions, we find that women and children have not fared particularly well. This tradition explains the late arrival of the presence of women and children explicitly protected and called out as possessors of human rights in the modern era.[12]

However, for all the problems with Western philosophy and religious traditions, they both represent predominant sources for human rights thinking, for historical reasons of the social development in the West and *not* necessarily because of the superiority of its traditions or theology. The secular, material struggles of the West, freeing its thought from the rigid doctrinal control of the Church and its economics from monarchies that left vast swathes of the citizenry in perpetual subjection to aristocracy, are more telling in the formation of the ideas of human worth that underlie human rights approaches than any particular religious sentiment. The legacy of centuries of religious wars, the rise of a mercantile class, and the Industrial Revolution together worked to liberate people from the inheritance of hopeless passivity in the face of authoritarian rule of whatever sort. While religion certainly lent a theological underpinning to that progress, it should not be installed as the *sine qua non* of a global ethic of worth and dignity, especially given religion's easy accommodation of its colonial appropriation by the state. Indeed, singling out Western religion, in whatever form, as the key desideratum of human rights approaches is guaranteed to cause some other cultures to reject human rights as a covert attack on their own religious or cultural sources of ethical reflection. At that point, we would argue that it is only by *extending* the basic ideas formulated in *all* our diverse inherited global texts, religious and secular, to new classes of people (and beings?)—women, slaves/servants, LGBTQ people, and all others—that human rights discourse can evolve into the more inclusive and flexible set of guidelines that we require.[13]

The Bible on Women's Human Rights: Yes, No, or Maybe?

As we turn to the Bible on the subject of the worth and dignity of women, we find the particular paradox alluded to above in full operation: the ancient world did *not* think of individual rights as moderns do, based on the historical developments between then and now. Thus, there is a certain illegitimacy in searching the Bible for a way to support ideas that far postdate the formulation of that text and its interpretations. Furthermore, while the Bible certainly influenced the West's legal, philosophical, and ethical traditions, it *also* represents one of the powerful edifices of intersecting ideas from which the West has struggled to free itself, embracing science, ecumenism, and even freedoms *from* religion as a species of freedom *of* religion. Should we actually look to "Scripture" to validate both the positive aspects of human rights discourse while acknowledging that human rights roundly trounces and discards far more of the biblical ethical teachings and world view than it retains?

THE NATURE OF THE TEXT

The Bible, of course, does not exist in a vacuum; nor will it be treated here as though it dropped out of heaven without human contact or engagement. The societies which created the Bible span at least a millennium and cover various forms of social organization: tribes, tribal associations, monarchies, colonies, home rule, conquest and deportation, restoration, and full domination by the brutal empire of Rome. Many of the views expressed in the Bible changed over time in response to the changing fortunes of the people and their understandings of how God was active in their national or personal lives. It would be improper to say that there is just *one* view of anything in the Bible and, for this reason, the communities that hold it sacred must find a way to tolerate, if not welcome, diversity of opinion on very serious matters. Communities *must* engage in interpretation due to the very nature of the project in which they find themselves involved.

Like most religious literature, the Bible holds a unique position in the communities that hold it as an *authority*—that is, a source by which other sources of knowledge or practice are to be judged. Whatever outsiders and non-believers may think of it, the Bible is claimed to be *special*, believable, and, in some way, compelling to those who claim it as their own. The Bible as *scripture* is reflexive in nature. It both *creates* a community, binding together those who hold it to be true and valuable, and it is continually *created* by that very community, who adds to the tradition, creating new parts and interpreting what

was inherited. The Bible gains its authority in various ways, with different groups emphasizing one approach over another, given their various histories and theologies.

In practice, of course, communities of faith and practice tend to view Scripture in overlapping modalities, seldom teasing out the particular ways that it functions as authority in various settings. It is worth noting that the Bible does not consist of only one authorial voice (that of God or Moses), nor does it contain only one kind of writing. Different voices carry different kinds of authority. Prophecy from God, delivered by a prophet claiming to give a divine message as accurately and faithfully as any diplomatic court messenger from a foreign king may carry more weight than a love song attributed to Solomon. An ancestor story or a narrative of a king's battle may be considered less "binding" in application than a legal text. Similarly, a psalm, which is a *human* lyric composed for worship of God, might edge out a bawdy folktale about hero Samson's love life for spiritual value to the believer. Not *all* texts carry the *same* authority, so interpretation by the community of readers/hearers is *always* required.

Reflexive Interpretation

The reflexivity principle of the Bible demands that readers do not simply let the text question *them*; believers are required to question the text as well, and it is in this practice that the norms of human rights thinking about universal human worth and dignity may be introduced. As we shall see below, such considerations are not alien to the Bible. Still, they were never part of the interests of the elites who wished to present their own wishes as reflecting those of their God. We require modern tools, along with biblical ones, to uncover the ancient worth of every body—even that of the enemy, a female child in the womb, or all flesh upon the earth.

Rights Talk in the Bible

Here, we will find that a close reading of the Hebrew Bible text discloses a powerful group ethic that shares much with Islamic, Asian, and socialist values around human rights. Because it comes from antiquity in the Levant, group

survival depended largely upon subsistence agriculture. Individual rights and fulfillment simply did not exist in any meaningful way. Each group (usually the extended family or clan) that could not operate cohesively and effectively during the agricultural seasons in a famine-prone region of micro-environments simply would not survive. Most social norms pushed and prodded group members toward a consciousness and set of behaviors designed to ensure collective success. The whole family worked on the group project of existence, understood as a viable and sustainable relationship of population to land and its resources.[14] While there were divisions of labor by gender, and later by trades as labor diversified in larger settlements, families were still the major economic units of production. Very young children were educated and minded by mothers, older women relatives, or unmarried girls. Later, boys were taught by their fathers and worked with them, while girls learned from their mothers and worked in groups on domestic projects of childcare, preparing foodstuffs, materials for cloth making, and hoe-agriculture adjacent to living compounds. Both genders' work was valued, and good workers were celebrated. Families held their tools in common, whether for farming or women's work. Specialists like potters, midwives, herbalists, carvers, and so on might have particular tools that would have been thought of as "theirs," but the biggest form of "property" held would be the "fields and flocks" that spelled life, the means of production for the family's survival.

Property rights, the honor which came from managing one's ancestral "inheritance" successfully, were probably the first and most important form of "rights" that the Bible came to recognize. When it appears, individual property such as Joseph's "coat of many colors," a gift from his father to his clear "favorite," might cause trouble within a domestic group, as Joseph's brothers' reactions clearly bear out. From the later Second Temple period when the Jews are under home rule by the Persian empire, the Book of Proverbs emphasizes "property"—its meaning, its management, its foibles, and its origin from God—while much legal material in Leviticus and elsewhere deals with the problems of conflict over land and other forms of property. Given that family property (land, animals, tools, seed) in antiquity was so closely tied to the continued ability to exist in an agricultural society, it is indeed a "human right," almost on par with the "right to life." When Micah and Isaiah talk about the rich turning the poor out of their ancestral land, they are talking about human rights violations.

It must be noted, as well, that in this matrix of the economies of the patriarchal family in mostly rural subsistence agricultural settings, legally women and their offspring fell into a liminal category. This marginalization had

the effect of compromising whatever individual rights might have been accorded to them, even in a setting in which rights talk has limited valence. This reality is reflected in the corpus of biblical law, and its later interpretation in Judaism, where women find themselves covered by both property law (adultery is a crime against the male owner of the wife) and inheritance law (where the widow's rights are in the hands of her male relatives). In the making of a marriage, a woman was usually supplied with a dowry of money, animals, or household items by her kin, according to their economic ability to provide; the groom's family paid a commensurate "bride price" to the bride's family. This economic exchange favored both families, as dowry formed the nucleus of the household property of the new mating unit, and the bride price acted as the foundation of the dowry for the next girl out of the groom's family to be married.

Consent by either young person, but most especially the girl, was not a prerequisite for marriage contracts. Marriage was not a matter of love or compatibility, but of economic exchange for the good of both families in a close-knit community (out-group exogamous marriage *removed* property from the economic unit and so was discouraged). It is easy to see how the bride and her pre-marital chastity could be considered "property" transferred from family of origin to the groom's family, and a matter of material, economic concern for both groups. She was a purchase under "warranty" for her virginity, now at the disposal of her new owners' needs. An investment who needed to "pay off" daily in terms of virtue, agreeability, and serviceability, her fertility was paramount to her new family hoping for male heirs and male workers to advance the family's wealth (survival). Females to give in marriage or add to domestic workgroups were not always unwelcome, but a surfeit could cause future inheritance problems. Violation of any of these norms could lead to deadly consequences. Somewhere between a person and a parcel, someone to be given away, used as collateral for debts, inherited, honored or beaten, everything about a woman's well-being depended on her abilities to birth a son, while maintaining her fidelity, and good name as a wife and mother. Reading the ancestor stories in Genesis through Samuel next to the United Nations report on Women's Rights and Religion, the sometimes ambivalent behavior of women toward their husbands, co-wives, children, and their own sense of self emerges in greater clarity.

In calculating the worth and dignity of women in biblical times, it would be wrong to overlook the native tokens of value that mark females' functional importance to their family units, and, hence, society, or to assume that women were powerless within their own settings. A woman with no economic resources

from her family or no male protector fared far worse in her life prospects, becoming a slave, or worse. A woman with a dowry, her own bank account as it were, had certain rights and restrictions on the use of that money by her future family and could seek redress were she to be divorced in some circumstances. The dowry was a visible, material sign of her worth to her family of origin, and signaled that she was expected to be valued commensurately in her new setting. The Bible regularly praises women who fulfill the patriarchal requirements of their gender roles, and lauds those who fill unlikely, out-of-bounds roles in society as themselves metaphorical "Mothers in Israel" (Judges 4–5). Likewise, barren women become a symbol for uselessness and failure.

Evaluating the Bible by UN Standards of Female Human Rights Abuses Related to Religion: The WUNRN Study (2002)

If philosophy, law, and even modern human rights (so far) have left women and children behind, it must be said that religion, which is generally understood by believers in world populations to be a good and healthy thing for humanity, has seldom done a better job. Substantial variations exist in the details of *how* the second-class nature of women's rights and place in the structure of the family in society play out cross-culturally. However, many of the ways that societies justify the curtailment of women's rights are *directly* related to (or wrongly imputed to) *religious* beliefs, traditions, and practices. This justification occurs globally, regardless of whether a nation is secular or religious, recognizes women as equal citizens before the law or not, and across religions—meaning no *one* religion is exempt from these tendencies; all are offenders to varying degrees. Survey studies undertaken by the United Nations allow us to identify worldwide a number of practices that violate the basic human rights of women, direct and unapologetic assaults on women's worth and dignity. All these owe their justification to supposed religious teachings, norms, and practices.

According to the UN Women's Report Network Study,[15] these are:

ideology of male superiority;

preference for sons over daughters (and for heterosexuals over other than heterosexual offspring);

institutionalized discrimination against women in situations of religious

extremism;
clothing restrictions;
female genital mutilation;
traditional birth practices and taboos;
practices relating to marriage and its dissolution:
child marriage, consent to marriage, dowry, divorce practices, polygamy,
abortion and control over family planning, levirate/sororate practices;
discrimination in matters of nationality;
inability to give legal evidence or testimony;
inheritance and independent administration of property;
violations of right to life:
infanticide, cruelty to widows, honor killings;
violations of dignity:
prostitution and abuses related to slavery, rape, and sexual abuse;
social exclusion:
violation of the right to education, bar to political participation, bar to holding office (including religious office), bar to public worship;
aggravated discrimination:
sex tourism, persecution of women targeted for their ethnicities or class.

It would be depressingly easy to page through the texts of the Bible, Hebrew or Greek, enumerating multiple examples of the abuses called out by the United Nations report of the impact of religion on women. These go largely unobserved or remarked upon by authors, interpreters, and readers. In other words, the wretched situation for women and girls in "Scripture" has become so normalized that it is barely felt, much less addressed head on. Even worse, in many places in the text itself the devaluation of women is presented not just as acceptable, but as the direct will of God as a punishment for some mythic infraction (Gen. 3; 1 Tim.; Ben Sira). This is a position many male interpreters still endorse with ill-concealed approval.

A glance at the condition of modern women globally confirms that, in many places, things have changed very little since the biblical religions first appeared. If we find little to praise in overt analysis of the treatment of women there, perhaps more may be said by turning to the theological context of the Bible's views. This is the maximalist approach extended to reflexive interpretation. We

will conclude, then, with what many consider the Bible's best and most coherent statements on human worth as a countering testimony which awaits full application to the rest of humanity. Our "best" texts lodge the origin of rights for humanity directly within God's creative impulse and gift of the *imago Dei*, the Divine Image. Although this is a late post-exilic text, we judge it a good thing: after exile and despair, a new view of what endures was forged out of unbearable suffering. No longer does the creation of Man supersede that of Woman, reversing the observable order; now, male and female come together in "birth order" and worth.

In the creation story in Genesis 1, written by elites who had been deported to Babylon in the sixth century BCE, the structure from Babylonian myths was reused with a hopeful twist for discouraged exiles. Creation is pronounced "good." Humanity, made together as male and female, on the same day as other land mammals, is also good, and the final part of the whole creation which causes God to exclaim that it is all "very good" indeed. Beyond that pronouncement, humanity is enjoined to breed (the model was good enough for full production!), to manage and watch over the rest of creation.

These special functions, compared to other members of creation, derive from humanity's special nature, bearing the *imago Dei*: made in the "image" (*tselem*) and "likeness" (*d'mut*) of Elohim. This Israelite generic name for God, derived from Canaanite, exhibits a masculine plural ending. In the original Hebrew, the Elohim speaker in 1:26 uses the pronoun "We" in proposing a creation which is modeled on the Elohim-self. Over the centuries Christian theologians have interpreted plural usage by God as referring to another member of the Trinity (Christ), or the Holy Spirit. Or, perhaps the "We" is a "plural of majesty" although that medieval concept does not appear in ancient Hebrew.

Others take a more grammatical, less Christian approach to avoid the theological scandal of potential female or multiple aspect of a unitary patriarchal god: Elohim may take a legitimate translation of "gods" in Canaanite and elsewhere in the Bible. Perhaps this refers to the "divine court" of godlings and angelic hosts, as male plural endings could routinely be used inclusively to cover female members in a mixed group. Archaeological studies from the twentieth century also gesture toward a divine female in the Creation story, the mother-tree goddess Asherah, known consort of the Canaanite creator god Elohim.[16] This makes good sense of the text: speaking to Asherah, his consort, Elohim wants to make mortals in "our likeness and image," the image of them *both*, and so the image turns out "male and female." Although the exact meaning here may be argued, it is clear that the image that accurately reflects Elohim is both female

and male. The female human made in Elohim's image bears the "divine" maker's mark. If that is the origin of human worth, which confers all dignity, then Woman is most definitively as worthy as Man.

The divine image, or *imago Dei*, whether read archaeologically and literarily as God's Asherah or left ambiguous, has routinely been cast as the foundation of all doctrines concerning human worth in Judaism. The *imago Dei* also certainly plays its role in Christianity, although it is subsumed by the importance of Jesus Christ as the first born of a new creation. Humans are *not* just good on the order of fish in the sea or sun in the sky; humans are in some way fashioned so as to reflect the image of God, and therein is their exemplary position as the crown of Creation forged. The Christian Incarnation underscores this: Jesus as "god" makes clear what human dignity can mean, and it is salvific. The Bible is not simply speaking of soil that breeds; it is that the soil has been created to talk, remember, breed, cry, laugh, and pray. That is the divine image at work.

Here we come full circle, as we find the crux that causes minimalist human rights discourse to depart from maximalist human rights discourse. Humanity's superlative worth is *not inherent* to the human being. The worth and dignity, like our breath, is solely a *gift* from God, conferred in the generous moment of creation. The position of mortals before God must *always* be one of total gratitude and unflinching obedience in return for this behest; humans have no *rights* before God, no claim upon the divine, in this form of thinking.

However, *other humans* have claims that must be honored, for they too have been given God's image. In Matthew 25, those who aid *any* member of a suffering group have, in fact, performed that service for Jesus. Honoring fellow humans is a demand that hinges upon understanding that God's image in them demands it. God is the ultimate guarantor of rights, but human communities must try their best to fashion laws and norms of conduct which give daily witness to their foundation in God's image recognized upon earth in the person of the neighbor. Behind every human law and order stands God as guarantor of justice to the *imago Dei*. Although the *imago Dei* appears in a late text, relatively speaking, one sees the idea at work in much earlier texts as people try to figure out how to live out their lives together.

Rejects and Prospects: What Endures?

Human rights minimalists are deeply critical of an epistemology of rights that begins by diminishing any intrinsic worth in human life in favor of positing the

good in an other-worldly being conferring meaning externally, sometimes rather irrationally. Neither will maximalists ever give assent to any approach to ethics which does not place the creature in necessary submission to its Creator. But in the midst of this impasse, *neither* religion nor secular philosophy or laws can show any substantive, indisputable reason (other than bias) as to why more than half of humanity should be treated as prey, held in conditions of near-slavery, and subjected to every kind of demeaning abuse known to Man. Social ills can often be defined by their philosophically and culturally constructed relationship to the category "woman": men held as slaves are denied full moral and social agency as they are treated "like women"; LGBTQ persons muddy the waters of male sexual hegemony, treating men "like women" and allowing women to "act as men"; members of other races are often "feminized" to become undeserving of the full rights accorded to men of dominant races. Beneath any human rights abuse, one is likely to find a female figuration that justifies the practice. We live in a world where religion has no monopoly on misogyny but no remedy for the binary fear that *any* form of difference signals dangerous *deviance* from a "natural" male norm, regardless of doctrinal statements to the contrary. When wed to the powers of the state, religion has usually been a willing offender of its own best practices.

While countless biblical views still hold sway today as moral guides, much of the modern world has seen its faith in a divine guarantor of law and rights die in the fires of Auschwitz, the bombing of Gaza, and the wreckage of Syria. The sanctity of the divine image has proved no guarantee of humane treatment of the bodies that bear its stamp. What endures is our search for a way to live with one another where *all* mortals are admitted to be human, knit into one common life on one fragile earth. Promises of a golden life eternal are of profound interest to some parts of Scripture, but beyond the scope of human rights discourse. The struggle for a decent, sustainable life *now* is the more pressing issue for the pilgrim children of earth who follow the path of human rights, where truths are written in blood as well as words. The Bible has much to say, but it is not the only voice crying out "Wilderness!"

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CHAPTER 3

CATHOLIC ANDROCENTRIC BIBLE TRANSLATIONS AS GLOBAL MISSIONARY TOOLS?

CAROL J. DEMPSEY, OP

THE Bible has fascinated religious and secular people alike. Catholics consider the Bible to be inspired and authoritative. Together with tradition, it forms the foundation of Catholic theology. Unsurprisingly, then, the Bible is an object of intrigue, comfort, challenge, and controversy. Translators continue to add to its plethora of translations, while also translating the text into countless languages. Other translators continue to revise it from one version and edition to another, always seeking to provide readers with a clearer, more accurate translation closer to the "original texts" or one that makes sense to readers in the target language. Yet no matter how great or how meticulous a translator's efforts are to produce the best version of the text, no translation is without theological, cultural, gender, racial, and ethnocentric biases. All translations are interpretations, and usually translators are required to follow certain norms or principles of translation.

Like many other Christian denominations, the Catholic Church is part of the Bible's long translation history. Currently, the American Catholic Church plans to publish another edition of its New American Bible. This new edition will feature a revised translation that reflects more closely the Church's core values. The edition is intended for catechetical study and incorporation into the planned revision of the 1992 Lectionary for Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours. The production of a revised translation is challenging because, unlike other

translations, the Catholic Church's Bible translation is under the auspices of Vatican officials.

This essay discusses the arduous process and principles of translation involved in producing a revised translation for the U.S.-American Catholic Church. The first section explores the landscape of Bible translations in general. The second section discusses why the United States bishops wish to have a new Bible translation and for what purpose. The third section carefully examines the principles of translation established by the Catholic Church's Vatican officials, exposing problems and pitfalls of the new translation and its ramifications for the Catholic community. The fourth section assesses whether the new translation serves the Catholic Church in its global missionary endeavors. The conclusion presents two approaches that could help bring the revised translation into the twenty-first century. Although the essay focuses on the translation process of the Bible as a whole, specific comments are geared to the Old Testament, the last of the two testaments currently "under construction." Finally, this revised Bible translation invites a strong feminist critique because the translation continues to perpetuate discrimination, marginalization, male hegemony, and the imperial power of church and world structures and attitudes that are violent, oppressive, and non-transformative.

Are Bible Translations Contemporary or Moribund? Perusing the Literary Landscape

Enjoying a long and rich translation history, the Bible is certainly one of the most popular and controversial books ever written. As of June 2019, the Bible has been translated into 683 languages, with the New Testament appearing in an additional 1,534 languages, and other Bible selections and stories translated into another 1,133 languages.[1] In the United States, Bible translations occurred in four waves. The first wave began when America declared its independence from England. In 1663, a Puritan clergyman and missionary named John Eliot produced the first English translation of the Bible on the American continent. Entitled *Mamusse Wunneetupanatamwe Up-Biblum God* and written in the language of the Massachusetts Algonquin Native Americans, this Bible had two editions (1663 and 1685). Robert Aitken, a Philadelphia printer, produced the first American-printed English language New Testament (1777) and then the

entire Bible (1782). Thus began the production of English-language Bibles in the United States that reached a high point with the printing of the English version of the Protestant King James Bible (KJV) in 1782. The Catholic Douay-Rheims Challoner version, published by Matthew Carey (1790), followed. Translated from the Latin Vulgate, this Catholic version received approval from the Catholic Church hierarchy and served as the Catholic Bible well into the twentieth century.

The second wave occurred between the 1820s and the 1870s. This time period saw the American Bible Society take shape. The ABS churned out millions of copies of the KJV whose English translation became designated as "formal equivalence."[2]

During the third wave from the 1870s to the 1980s, English-language Bible translations flourished. Literalist interpretations of the Bible and literal translations attracted much attention and interest. It gave birth to the Fundamentalist Movement, started by a group of literalist, interdenominational Protestants in the early twentieth century. Six prominent American Bible translations came into existence: the American Standard Version (ASV, 1901);[3] the Revised Standard Version (RSV, 1952);[4] Today's English Version (TEV, 1966);[5] the New American Bible (NAB, 1970);[6] The Living Bible (TLB, 1971);[7] and the New International Version (NIV, 1978).[8] The ASV, RSV, and NAB were formal equivalence translations. The TEV was a dynamic equivalence translation;[9] the NIV combined elements of both formal and dynamic equivalence. During this third wave, many revisions of these translations were produced. For instance, the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV, 1989), a revision of the RSV, gave some attention to inclusive language.[10]

The fourth wave began in the late 1980s and continues into the twenty-first century. This wave offered several new inclusive Bible translations in English[11] that followed Lawrence Venuti's foreignization strategy. It aims at challenging the status quo of the target-language society and the hegemonic norms in the target-language context.[12] One example for this strategy is *The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Translation* (2007).[13] This dynamic equivalence translation, presenting different ways of speaking about God, such as "Almighty" or "Sovereign One" instead of "Father" and "Lord," eliminates sexist vocabulary. The translation also recovers women's active participation in salvation history. For example, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are referenced with their female counterparts, Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, and Rachel, although Hagar, Bilhah, and Zilpah are omitted. Thus, this translation addresses discriminatory

and male-centered ways of thinking in order to present readers with a transformative translation.

During the fourth wave, the Catholic *New American Bible Revised Edition* (NABRE) took final shape in 2010 and was published in 2011. This new revision is the culmination of nearly twenty years of work by a group of nearly one hundred scholars and theologians, including bishops, revisers, and editors. A revision of the original *New American Bible* (NAB), this formal-equivalence translation mostly follows the 1989 *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV) by also incorporating more inclusive language than the NAB. The *New American Bible Revised Edition* (NABRE) includes a fully revised Old Testament, a revision of the 1986 revision of the *New American Bible* (NAB) psalms, and the 1986 revision of the New Testament. The first 1986 revision of the original NAB psalms translation was highly controversial among Catholic officials because of its inclusive language that did not conform with the Vatican's guidelines for liturgical translations. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) sponsors both the NAB and the NABRE. This Conference, in conjunction with various other Vatican agencies, makes the final decisions on the acceptability of translations with Catholic doctrine. Of utmost concern among the bishops is the preservation of male language for God, as it pertains to pronouns and imagery. Both the NAB and NABRE also include extensive explanatory notes that provide readers with background discussions and doctrinal principles.

Thus, both religious and market interests are the driving forces behind many American Bible translations. The question remains if any of these Bibles and their respective translations are contemporary or moribund. The perusal of the literary landscape suggests that some Bible translations are contemporary and transformational while others are moribund and out of touch with American thought and language patterns. The issues, however, are much deeper than language. If the Catholic Bible is to be a translation for the twenty-first century that is not only transformative but also responsive to the Church's global mission, deeper changes need to occur beyond translation revisions. The following section discusses the next translation revision of the already revised edition of the New American Bible (NABRE).

WHY THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS FAVORS ANOTHER BIBLE TRANSLATION

Several reasons exist as to why the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops plans to publish a revised translation of the NABRE. First, the bishops wish to have a new revision. The Conference of Bishops is the governing body for the entire Catholic Church in the United States, having full authority to request and initiate a revision regardless of the Catholic laity's preferences. As part of a larger hierarchical, all-male ordained, and ecclesiastical structure headquartered in Vatican City within Rome, the Conference of Bishops collaborates with Vatican officials who approve the mandates and practices of the Conference. Although several models of "church" exist,[14] Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI embraced the institutional model for the Church. This model presents the church as doctrinal, hierarchical, patriarchal, kyriarchal, and clerical. Many United States church officials appointed prior to Pope Francis fit this model of church. This institutional model insists on the authority of the office holders whose task is to guide, teach, and sanctify. The model gives power to the United States bishops. In turn, the bishops draw their authority from this model. Hence, if the bishops wish to have a new revision of the NABRE translation, then the NABRE translation will be revised again.

Second, in line with Vatican II's mandate to revise the liturgical texts to ensure that full and active participation becomes the normative practice, the bishops are planning a revision of the two main books that Catholics use for their liturgies, namely, the 1992 Lectionary for Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours. The bishops would like to have the same wording for the translation of the biblical texts to be included in these two projects. In this sense, then, the revision of the NABRE's translation has mainly a liturgical purpose and will be a liturgical translation.

Third, Vatican officials have not approved the NABRE translation for incorporation into the Lectionary for Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours because of some of the NABRE's inclusive language and other translation word choices. Hence, the bishops need a translation that can receive Vatican approval for use in the upcoming revised editions of the Church's two liturgical books. History bears out that the Conference of Bishops and Vatican officials argued for several years about the various revised translation editions of the NAB and which edition was suitable for inclusion in the lectionary. Bible scholars, bishops, and Vatican officials entered into heated debates, with the liveliest one being over the 1986 NAB inclusive language psalter translation. Neither the team of Bible scholars nor the United States bishops could get Vatican officials to approve the translation for inclusion in the lectionary. Finally, a small delegation of bishops

and Vatican officials met together in Rome and worked on further translation revisions to the NAB revised psalter. They removed the inclusive language in many psalms. Their efforts led to the approval of the 1992 revised Lectionary for Mass. This lectionary included the 1970 NAB Old Testament translations, the revisions to the 1986 NAB revised psalter, and the 1986 NAB New Testament translations. Of note, the bishops suggested that the NRSV texts could be a possible other option for the revised lectionary readings, but Vatican officials concluded that this translation was also "unsuitable" for liturgical purposes because of its inclusive language and its translation of *'almâ* as "young woman" instead of "virgin" in Isa 7:14.

Fourth, the revised translation needs to embrace the vision and directives of the Council for the Implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy that states:

> The purpose of liturgical translations is to proclaim the message of salvation to believers and to express the prayer of the church to the Lord. … To achieve this end, it is not sufficient that a liturgical translation merely reproduce the expressions and ideas of the original text. Rather it must faithfully communicate to a given people, and in their own language, that which the Church by means of this given text originally intended to communicate to another people 'in another time'. A faithful translation, therefore, cannot be judged on the basis of individual words: the total context of this specific act of communication must be kept in mind, as well as the literary form proper to the respective language.[15]

This statement offers some latitude for Bible translations when it acknowledges that "it is not sufficient that a liturgical translation merely reproduce the expressions and ideas of the original text …." Furthermore, the point that liturgical translations "must faithfully communicate to a given people, and in their own language …" calls translators to take into account the social location and economic, gender, ecological, anthropological, and psychological context of the community reading the text. Yet the statement also imposes doctrinal constraints for translations that have affected past translations of NAB texts, including the NABRE translation. Whether or not Bible scholars working on the translation committee will be able to implement dynamic language that speaks to the community's context is undetermined.

Fifth, the bishops are hoping that this new revised translation will lead to a new edition of the NABRE. The new revised translation will be the official Bible for Catholics[16] and will be suitable for catechesis and study. The explicit goal is for Catholics to read, study, pray, and hear the proclaimed "Word of God" in the same translation so that the laity will not be confused. The implicit goal, however, seems to be the desire to keep Catholics colonized, indoctrinated, and

acculturated in the present culture of the clerical, hierarchical, patriarchal, sexist, heteronormative-supporting, racist, classist, and ethnocentric institutional Church whose "Church Fathers" have helped shape its doctrines and tradition. The tradition, meant to be a living and ongoing one of which the Church Fathers are only a small part, remains frozen in time. The current male church officials thus leave both the Bible and the Catholic tradition stuck in worldviews that cease to make sense to many twenty-first-century Catholics.

In sum, for these five reasons, the bishops would like to have a revision of the NABRE. The important question that surfaces is this one: To whom does this new Bible translation belong? The relevance of this question is conditioned on the fact that the United States Church is culturally and linguistically pluralistic. Having a uniform translation goes against the liturgical principle of full and active participation.

Whose Bible Is the New Revised Translation Anyway? Negotiating the Translation Principles

Without a doubt, the NAB's history and its connection to the Lectionary for Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours indicates that a revised translation of the NABRE will have the United States Catholic Bishops and church documents shaping the conversation. Thus, the revised translation will enjoy the Vatican's approval. To accomplish the translation revision task, the Bishops' Conference established an editorial board of Old Testament and New Testament Bible scholars and a team of revisers to work with the editorial board. The revisers do not have to be Catholic, but they do need to belong to the Catholic Biblical Association of America. The bishops vetted every single scholar who is a part of this project. The chair of the bishops' subcommittee on the Translation of Scripture Texts and the Executive Director of the Secretariat of Doctrine and Canonical Affairs—a priest—of the Bishops' Conference will oversee the project.

The Old Testament section of the editorial board consists of three male and two female scholars. Altogether, the board and Conference representatives consist of five ordained and three non-ordained members. Having two female scholars on the board does not make it "inclusive." Any scholar who believes so is a neoliberal feminist.[17] Additionally, the translation board is all white; it does

not represent the races, classes, cultures, and ethnicities of the Catholic population in the United States who will receive this new translation. Thus, with the exception of the two females, the basic composition of the board reflects the institutional male white Church. Moreover, the translation process and the translation guidelines attest to the Church's patriarchal and kyriarchal nature and attitudes asserted through its officials on this translation project.

One further note, the power cards seem to be stacked against the three non-ordained members of the board. The two non-ordained female scholars and the one non-ordained male scholar could easily become marginalized because none of them are ordained in the church's hierarchical structure. How much of a deliberative role will the editorial board have? The answer is not yet known. How much influence will the two female scholars have? The effect is yet to be determined, but their thought must be part of the conversation and their voices must be heard. The translation committee has invited them to the table, and they will address what needs to be addressed and speak truth to power in whatever ways possible.

Guided by the Church documents *Liturgiam authenticam*, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, *Dei Verbum*, *Verbum Domini*, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, and *the Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*,[18] the Old Testament editors drew up a set of translation revision principles that the bishops approved. The principles for the revised translation are clear: first, a formal equivalence translation from the "original texts"; second, a word choice "more literal and faithful to the original texts," i.e., "one like a son of man" and not "one like a human being," "virgin" and not "young woman," among other words and phrases; third, inclusive language used sparingly while retaining gender-specific language, pronouns, and metaphors for God; and fourth, a translation faithful to the dogmatic and doctrinal teachings of Catholicism that shows the interrelatedness of the two testaments and intertestamental congruity when Old Testament phrases having implications for the New Testament are rendered in a specific way.

Several issues stand out with respect to the translation revision principles. The first issue concerns the translation approach. A formal equivalence translation allows the Church hierarchy to remain closed to new twentieth- and twenty-first-century advances in Bible translation theory. R. S. Sugirtharajah makes the case that "[t]he Bible translations in the colonial period introduced such virtues as accuracy, authenticity, and being true to original texts … ."[19] A formal equivalence translation allows the bishops to return to a sixteenth-century, post-Reformation, Protestant model that is text-centered and not reader-

centered. Since for Catholics the final interpreters of Scripture are, when doubt exists, the Church's hierarchy, having a translation supportive and protective of the institution and its power structure and mindset seems to be important to the bishops, as historical evidence demonstrates. A formal equivalence translation keeps the teaching, ruling, and sanctifying power of the Catholic Church in the hands of its ordained male hierarchy. This type of translation sustains the hierarchy's control over the laity, keeps Catholics colonized to a way of thinking and believing, and allows "the Word of God" to continue contributing to the nation's and world's systemic androcentrism and related patriarchy and kyriarchy. Androcentrism, patriarchy, and kyriarchy are made "holy and acceptable" by many of the Bible's words, phrases, references, stories, and poems that are shining examples of violence, hatred, bigotry, racism, sexism, and abuse. These situations are especially exacerbated when God's inspired Word is prayed and proclaimed in and during sacred services. No finer way exists than Catholic sacred services to acculturate the laity into the male, white, and Western hegemony of church and world.

The second issue concerns a "literal translation." According to Catholic Bible scholar Gerard S. Sloyan a "literal translation" does not exist.[20] All translations involve words that do not have meanings by themselves because readers assign meanings to them. Meanings are "codetermined by their relationships to other words and sentences, which form their context."[21] Bible words are alphabetized and classified in Bible dictionaries and lexica, which are the fruits of the male, elite, Western intellectual tradition. In no way, then, do Bible dictionaries and lexicons aid in understanding the original texts of the Bible in their historical or cultural contexts.[22] Thus, all translations, including the new translation of the Catholic Bible, are interpretations of words with meanings ascribed to them. No interpretation is without theological, cultural, gender, racial, and ethnocentric biases that continue to perpetrate systemic injustice today. In short, every translation violates.

The third issue concerns the sparse use of inclusive language. Language is dynamic and has power. It reflects culture and shapes religious beliefs. Language also excludes. By allowing exclusive language to dominate the Church's cornerstone document, namely its Scriptures, bishops and other Vatican officials continue to perpetuate male hegemony and the marginalization of women in the church. Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite rightly argues that "inclusive language is born in the struggle of those who are linguistically invisible as they come to the recognition that their linguistic invisibility reflects and perpetuates the exclusivist bias of the institutions of their society."[23] Catholic women living on

the margins today and choosing to stay within the Catholic Church institutional structure will find Thistlethwaite's point extremely challenging because they have neither the power nor the influence to effect change in the Church's core documents that could be a source of institutional transformation. The new translation of the Catholic Bible is a classic example. Moreover, many faithful Catholics in the United States are still tuning in to the television show "Father Knows Best," hearing the show's scripts being aired during the Church's Eucharistic liturgies in particular. Non-inclusive language marginalizes and discriminates against diversity. It is not acceptable for God's people who are "church."

The fourth issue concerns non-inclusive language for the Divine. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza argues boldly:

> The writings of the Hebrew Bible use the imperial languages of Near Eastern empires, whereas those of the Christian Testament are imbued with Roman imperial language. In the context of medieval feudal system, Christian the*logy celebrated G*d the Father as an all-powerful king and an omniscient ruler of the universe.[24] The absolute power of G*d has legitimated the power of princes and overlords, of bishops and popes, of fathers and husbands, of Christian mission and colonization.[25]

Satoko Yamaguchi takes Schüssler Fiorenza's point a step further, maintaining:

> We need to expand inclusive language for G*d to the dimensions of ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and further particularities of human embodiment, all of which are created in *the image of G*d*. Such an action is meant not to valorize all the diversity engendered by kyriarchal oppression but to see the image of G*d embodied in each person, even in a variety of exploited or distorted situations, so that we can clearly see our structural sins, which are against G*d's creation. We need to expand as well our divine language to include various dimensions of the entire cosmos that may also be reflections of *the image of G*d*. Our divine kyriarchy will be gradually dismantled only with our conscious use of such multidimensional inclusive language.[26]

Clearly, Yamaguchi pushes the boundaries of language beyond androcentric and even anthropocentric inclusivity.

Together, Schüssler Fiorenza's and Yamaguchi's comments uncover two points relative to the planned new edition of the Catholic New American Bible with its revised translation. Most importantly, the insistence of the bishops and Vatican officials on non-inclusive language for the Divine perpetuates the patriarchal and kyriarchal governing structures that legitimate their own power and authority. In addition, the insistence on a male deity and its many male attributes, especially the warrior image (Exod. 15:3) that lops off peoples and nations and even punishes non-human life, reveals how deeply ingrained the male hierarchical Church is in its own androcentric culture, as it intersects with

anthropocentrism. Through this intersection, male becomes the dominant gender of humanity. Moreover, the male metaphors for God have shaped and will continue to shape not only Catholic theology and ethics but also the Church's policies, doctrines, dogmas, and ultimately, most of its ruling body's self-understanding, attitudes, and actions. Such metaphors have also shaped Catholic belief and Catholic religious imagination. Embedded in many Catholic texts and prayers are images of God derived from the Old Testament. Among them are God the "father" (e.g., Jer. 3:4, 19, 31), "Lord" (e.g., Exod. 20:2; 34:6; Ps. 106:48), "king" (Prov. 24:21; Isa. 44:6), the avenging "warrior" (Exod. 15:3; Isa. 42:13), the heavenly "monarch" (Isa. 6:1–8), and the "husband" of Israel (Isa. 54:5). All of these metaphors promote patriarchy, kyriarchy, violence, and heteronormatism, attitudes and systems of thought so characteristic of many Church officials today.

The fifth issue concerns certain common words and phrases shared between the Old Testament and the New Testament. For the bishops to follow *Liturgiam authenticam* and Vatican officials to insist on a translation that shows the interrelatedness of the two testaments, especially when Old Testament phrases are translated in a way that supports the doctrinal statements of the New Testament, such as "son of man" (Dan. 7:13; Matt. 20:18) and "virgin" (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23), is to "Christianize" the Old Testament. This "Christianizing" of the Old Testament will produce a "Catholic" Bible that strongly supports Catholic doctrine within both testaments. Yet this type of Bible promotes supersessionism, the mark of the colonizing church. The "new evangelization," a movement started by Pope John Paul II and continued with Benedict XVI, illustrates colonization that takes place by proselytizing for the purpose of converting people to Christianity as the One True Faith, with Jesus Christ proclaimed as the only Lord and Savior and the only way to God.[27] The move to Christianize the Bible thus seems to be part of a larger renewal effort among some church officials who continue to embrace the vision of the previous two popes.

In sum, does room exist for negotiating the specific translation guidelines? The current evidence suggests a negative answer. Furthermore, the present institutional model of 'the Church', whose doctrinal teaching about the Trinity makes inclusive God-language impossible, whose foundational and "indispensable" method for translating and interpreting its Scriptures has been historical critical, whose governing officials will not cede their gendered positions of power for a more inclusive church, whose tradition prioritizes the teaching of Church Fathers, and whose pre–Vatican II narrow missionary

activity has been focused on proselytization instead of liberating evangelization, does not set the tone for substantive translation changes. The Catholic Church has many wonderful documents, but its praxis does not support the breadth, depth, and vision of its documents.

Laying Bare the Discrepancy between the Catholic Church's Global Missionary Goals and Its New Edition of the Bible to Be Studied and Proclaimed

Whether the new edition of the New American Bible with its revised translation will be a global missionary tool for the Catholic Church must be determined in the context of the vision of Vatican II. One of the Vatican II documents that deals with the missionary activity of the Church is *Ad Gentes* where "the church declared itself in solidarity with the whole human family and defined its mission in terms of service."[28] Building on the spirit of Vatican II, the latest papal Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, outlines a broader vision for church and mission. The current Pope Francis authored this Apostolic Exhortation. According to this document, the Church is not to be concerned with "being at the centre" (*EG* #49).[29] Its focus is to be on the care for people and not for the institution. Church leaders are to be in solidarity with God's people and not stand in solidarity with political rulers that exercise power and domination over the people of God. On this point, Andrea Riccardi observes that "Pope Francis does not believe in the church's hegemony over society. … To his way of thinking, the success of such hegemonies is weak and merely apparent."[30] For Francis, "being Church means being God's people …" (*EG* #114).[31]

Evangelii Gaudium goes on to state that if the Church takes up its missionary impulse, it has to reach everyone, especially the despised and overlooked (*EG* #48).[32] "The Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel" (*EG* #114).[33] Living out the Gospel is to take precedence over a personal and private relationship with God (*EG* #180).[34] Evangelization is not proselytizing[35] and is "the task of the Church. The Church, as the agent of evangelization, is more than an organic and hierarchical institution; she is first

and foremost a people advancing on its pilgrim way to God" (*EG* #111).[36] *Evangelii Gaudium* also makes clear that the Church is called to go to the margins, not only defined geographically but also in human terms. As a "community of people" and as "the People of God" (*EG* #115),[37] the Church is to celebrate and support cultural diversity. Furthermore, within *Evangelii Gaudium*, the document stresses that "the People of God is incarnate in the peoples of the earth, each with its own culture" (*EG* #115).[38] Thus, cultural diversity is not a threat to Church unity, and the revealed message of the Gospel is transcultural.

In concert with the spirit and focus of church and mission as *Evangelii Gaudium* articulates, the United States bishops have issued a number of pastoral letters that address cultural diversity in the American Catholic Church. One of these pastorals addresses racism,[39] and another letter elaborates on the pastoral needs of Asian and Pacific Island communities.[40] The bishops have also produced a new study on cultural diversity that displays the Catholic Church's growing multicultural population. Nowadays, more than 6,300 U.S. parishes serve distinct ethnic and cultural groups.[41] As a whole, the Catholic Church contains a rich deposit of documents that pertain to Catholic Social Teaching.[42] They emphasize the option for the poor and vulnerable and stress that God's people are one human family, despite and in harmony with national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences, or the care for God's creation. Thus, the Church and its mission is meant to be broad and people-centered, committed to justice, and called to stand in solidarity with all creation.

After perusing the broader understanding of Church and the landscape of its global mission, one can draw the conclusion that the revision of the New American Bible Revised Edition, with its translation principles mired in Western hegemony, and with its androcentric, discriminatory, and marginalizing language, perspectives, and content, will not be a global missionary tool for the proclamation of the Gospel which has justice as the constitutive element of its message. If the new edition of the Bible is to be a book for the global twenty-first century, then deeper changes need to take place in addition to translation revision.

Moving the Catholic Bible Translation into the Global Twenty-First Century: Concluding Comments

For the new edition of the New American Bible Revised (NABRE) to move into the twenty-first century and to become the book of the people instead of the hierarchical church, the text itself must undergo deeper revisions other than those outlined in the principles of translation. If not, the new edition with its refreshed translation will be moribund before it is even printed. A modest approach to change this scenario is to have translators and revisers of the NABRE's text use inclusive language liberally and especially for references to the Divine. Translators and revisers also need to go through every single text and eliminate any words or phrases that are anti-Jewish, sexist, racist, heteronormative, ethnocentric, ageist, classist, ableist, and otherwise discriminatory. Explanatory notes need to be extensive and demonstrate a reading of the text that goes against the grain. Preachers need to preach against the grain of the text instead of applying the text to daily life.

An inclusive approach to change the scenario is to decolonize completely the Bible from its Eurocentric and Catholic male cultures that have controlled its translations and the way the stories and poems are presented and told. All of the stories and poems need to be re-written from the perspective of all those who are on the margins. All language needs to be inclusive, especially for the Divine. Androcentric and heteronormative metaphors need to be replaced with inclusive ones. Non-dominant "voices" need to temper dominant ones, and silent ones need to be heard. All discriminatory, ethnocentric, racist, and sexist language needs to be eliminated, and women need to be "un-essentialized" and freed from the portraits male authors have given them. In making these changes, Bible translators and revisers begin to create a new tradition, one that is much needed in the twenty-first-century church. As Caroline Vander Stichele states: "What then can a feminist translator do? What is it that she wants to do? In my view, she can make a difference—*not so much in telling a different story, as in telling the story differently*."[43]

In order for the above changes to happen, the translation editorial board and team of revisers need to be reconfigured so that diversity, inclusion, and intellectual openness and creativity are the order of the day. The current editorial board of both Testaments consists of eight ordained and five non-ordained members. Of these members, ten are male and three are female. All are white, with the exception of one Latino. These present statistics do not speak to the demographic realities of the church for whom the new edition of the Bible is intended.

Furthermore, Catholic doctrines and dogmas need to be critiqued within the

complex hermeneutic dynamism operating in the global context. Meanings are dynamic. They are not static, and they are culturally conditioned. The doctrinal but metaphorical language for the Trinity needs to change so "Father" and "Lord" in both the Old Testament and New Testament can be revised to become more inclusive and less kyriarchal.

Additionally, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' model of church needs to shift from institution to community, which includes all creation. Substantial education, which did not occur after Vatican II, needs to take place for the whole Church. Everyone needs to wake up to the world around them to see how the Bible has been shaped by cultures and to recognize how the Bible with its hegemonic, sexist, classist, racist, ableist, hierarchical, patriarchal, and gender discriminatory contents contributes to the injustices in the contemporary globalized world. Catholics need to be in dialogue with scholars and members of other faith traditions so that God's community can learn together. Finally, the Vatican's tight control on the Catholic intellectual life and the work of its scholars needs to be loosed.

If some of these ideas are implemented, and the people of God are well educated to be open enough to receive the translation changes and content revisions, then perhaps the Catholic Church will have a new edition of the Bible, ready to be incorporated into the Lectionary for Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours. Then perhaps God's people and all creation can celebrate and proclaim with joy this new word that can become transformative, propelling the Church ever more deeply into its global mission of justice for all. And maybe then the church will have "the Word of God" and not its present "word of man." After all, the task of feminists is to change structures and not just to revise words.

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[1] The Wycliffe Global Alliance, a community of more than one hundred diverse organizations and networks working together in Bible translation movements throughout the world, has provided these statistics. See http://wycliffe.net/statistics.

[2] The literal or formal equivalence approach emphasizes a word-for-word translation of the biblical text. In her discussion on Bible translations, Susanne Scholz notes that "the Protestant-Reformation insisted on the idea that Bible translations are literalist-linguistic achievements transforming the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek texts into *formal* equivalents in manifold target languages." See Susanne Scholz, *The Bible as Political Artifact: On the Feminist Study of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), 301.

[3] The ASV (or otherwise known as the Revised Version, Standard American Edition) is a revision of the 1885 British version of the revised KJV, the RV. The ASV is almost identical to the 1885 Revised Version. The ASV became the basis for hundreds of later revisions, some of which include the RSV.

[4] The RSV is a revision of the ASV. The original Catholic Edition of the RSV was published in 1966. The RSV also became the basis for the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV, 1989) and the English Standard Version (ESV, 2001). The Catholic Edition of the NRSV was published in 2006.

[5] The TEV is also called the *Good News Bible* (GNB). In 1992, the translation was revised to use some inclusive language, though the masculine pronouns for "God" and the term "Lord" remained unchanged.

[6] The NAB used original biblical languages for its translation.

[7] TLB is an English paraphrase of the ASV.

[8] The NIV translators used the highest quality available biblical manuscripts written in the original biblical languages.

[9] Functional or dynamic equivalence approach emphasizes translating the Hebrew texts thought for thought and not word for word. Focus is on readers' sensibilities instead of text translation accuracy.

[10] The NRSV, REB, and NJB all have some sensitivity to inclusive language, but in general they retain the masculine pronouns for "God" (see, e.g., Psalms 136, 147) as well as such terms like "Lord" and "King" for the Divine (see, e.g., Psalm 145).

[11] See, e.g., Joe Dearborn, Mark Buckley, and Craig R. Smith: Priests for Equality, *The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Translation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007); *The New Testament and Psalms: An Inclusive Version* (1995); *The New International Version: Inclusive Language Edition* (NIVI, 1996); and *The Contemporary Torah: A Gender-Sensitive Adaption of the JPS Translation* (2006). *The Common English Bible* (2013) employs dynamic equivalence and aims to make use of inclusive language, but the translation falls short on creating alternatives to the texts' God-language and thus continues to use such kyriarchal terms as "Lord" for the Divine.

[12] For further discussion on this strategy, see Susanne Scholz, "The Scandal of Inclusive Bible Translations: Foreignizing the Bible," *Celebration Publications* (April 2019): 3–5; Scholz, *The Bible as Political Artifact*, 302–4.

[13] Joe Dearborn, Mark Buckley, and Craig R. Smith: Priests for Equality, *The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Translation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2007).

[14] For the classic post–Vatican II work on this topic, see Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York, NY: Random House, 1978).

[15] See International Commission on English in the Liturgy, "Instruction *Comme le prevoit*: On the Translation of Liturgical Texts for Celebration with a Congregation, 25 January 1969," in *Documents on the Liturgy: 1963–1979* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1982), 843. This Commission that wrote the aforementioned document was established in 1969 whose charge was the implementation of the Constitution on the Liturgy, one of the Vatican II documents.

[16] In her early work, Catholic Bible scholar Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza describes the Bible paradigms as doctrinal, historical, and pastoral-theological; see Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1984), 23–42. The new revised Bible translation, as directed by the bishops, will safeguard and promote the doctrinal and historical paradigms of the Bible with little or no regard for the pastoral-theological paradigm. The latter paradigm speaks to the diverse and marginalized Catholic population, the people of God, that will receive the newly revised translation.

[17] For an excellent discussion on neoliberal feminism, see Esther Fuchs, "Reclaiming the Hebrew Bible for Women: The Neoliberal Turn in Contemporary Feminist Scholarship," *JFSR* 24.2 (2008): 45–65; see also one of her latest works: Esther Fuchs, *Feminist Theory and the Bible: Interrogating the Sources* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016).

[18] For the specific documents, see the website of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

[19] R. S. Sugirtharajah, "Textual Cleansing: A Move from the Colonial to the Postcolonial Version," in *Race, Class, and Politics of Bible Translation*, ed. Randall C. Bailey and Tina Pippin (Semeia 76; Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 1996), 12.

[20] See Gerard S. Sloyan, "Some Thoughts on the Bible," *Worship* 75 (2001): 235. For further discussion on this myth of literal translations, see also Caroline Vander Stichele, "Murder She Wrote or Why Translation Matters: A Response to Mary Phil Korsak's 'Translating the Bible,'" in *Bible Translation on the Threshold of the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Jan Willem van Henten (JSOTSupp 353; New York, NY: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd, 2002), 147–55.

[21] Jeremy Punt, "Translating the Bible in South Africa: Challenges to Responsibility and Contextuality," in ibid., 95.

[22] On the intersection of language, power, and the formation of dictionaries, see Letty M. Russell, "Inclusive Language and Power," *Religious Education* 80.4 (Fall 1985): 582–602. She argues that language, dictionaries, and power are interrelated, and that society's elite set the norms for language and control the resources for education and communication. To expose cultural imperialism and the biases of translators and lexicons, see Johnson Kiriaku Kinyua, "A Postcolonial Analysis of Bible Translation and Its Effectiveness in Shaping and Enhancing the Discourse of Colonialism and the Discourse of Resistance: The Gikuyu New Testament—A Case Study," *Black Theology* 112.1 (2013): 58–95. He explains on p. 85: "[B]efore the writing happens, the translator will look for lexical equivalence of the source text in the targeted language. If the targeted language lacks convincing lexical equivalence, the translator will either borrow from elsewhere or create his or her own lexicon."

[23] Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, "Inclusive Language: Theoretical and Philosophical Fragments,"

Religious Education 80.4 (Fall 1985): 558.

[24] Here Schüssler Fiorenza draws on the thought of Brian Wren, *What Language Shall I Borrow? God-Talk in Worship: A Male Response to Feminist Theology* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1989), 119.

[25] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 207.

[26] Satoko Yamaguchi, "Father Image of G*d and Inclusive Language," in *Toward a New Heaven and a New Earth*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 215.

[27] See the Vatican document *Dominus Iesus: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church*, available on the website of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

[28] Timothy G. McCarthy, *The Catholic Tradition: Before and after Vatican II 1878–1993* (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 1994), 84.

[29] See the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops' website for the entire text of *Evangelii Gaudium*.

[30] Andrea Riccardi, *To the Margins: Pope Francis and the Mission of the Church* (trans. Dinah Livingstone; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2018), 19.

[31] *Evangelii Gaudium*.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

[34] *Evangelii Gaudium*.

[35] "Message of Pope Francis for World Mission Day 2013."

[36] *Evangelii Gaudium*.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

[39] See *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love—A Pastoral Letter against Racism*; the full text can be viewed on the United States Catholic Bishops' website.

[40] See *Encountering Christ in Harmony: A Pastoral Response to Our Asian and Pacific Island Brothers and Sisters*. The full text appears on the website of the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops.

[41] See the United States Catholic Bishops' website for the full text of the study.

[42] For the foundational documents on Catholic Social Teaching, see the website of the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops. Also see John A. Coleman and William F. Ryan, eds., *Globalization and Catholic Social Thought* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005).

[43] Vander Stichele, "Murder She Wrote of Why Translation Matters," 155.

CHAPTER 4

THE CHALLENGE OF FEMINIST BIBLE TRANSLATIONS IN AFRICAN CONTEXTS

DORA R. MBUWAYESANGO

COLONIAL Bible translations into African languages have violated indigenous African cultures and religions for centuries. Even worse, colonial Bible translations have not only attempted to obliterate African cultures and religions, but they also imposed Western patriarchal notions about gender that negatively impacted African women and their socio-political status in their societies. Since colonial translations reinforced Western notions about Western colonial supremacy, they contributed to the dispossession of Africans and their land, culture, and dignity. Western missionaries produced the colonial translations that assaulted African cultures and proclaimed Western patriarchal ideology as inherent in biblical teaching. The translations thus ensured that African women experienced increased sexist oppression and marginalization even within their indigenous African cultures.

During the past few decades, postcolonial revisions of colonial Bible translations tried to correct the extensive imperial biases that were produced during the active colonial period. For instance, the translation of *Badimo* (ancestors) for "demons" in the Setswana Bible was changed. Yet explicit and implicit sexist translations in African Bibles that have led to African women's exclusion and marginalization are still part of many official translation projects in many African contexts because most African Bible translation projects are

still male-dominated. They ignore feminist challenges to androcentric language and patriarchal images, and they exclude women translators on a regular basis.

This essay calls African Bible translators to remedy the sexist and patriarchal conventions that continue to plague Bible translations even in African postcolonial contexts. It demands that African Bible translators stop using translations as a patriarchal weapon to oppress and marginalize women in all spheres of African society, including in the political, economic, social, and religious life. The good news is that female and some male Bible scholars have begun to challenge the patriarchal privilege in African culture and religion, including in contemporary Bible translations.[1] We need more Bible translations in African contexts that are not merely produced for evangelization purposes and are thus infused with notions about biblical supremacy and the conversion of Africans to the Christian religion. Growing numbers of African Bible scholars contribute to the ongoing educational effort that exposes sexist and patriarchal translation principles and habits as intersectional with the colonizing and supremacist agenda that goes back to the colonial era. Yet, in the postcolonial era, African Bible scholars should want to press a restart button to produce African Bible translations that do not advance any more colonizing and "patriarchalizing" biblical meanings that disempower African culture and religion.

Examining the history, habits, and conventions of colonial and sexist African Bible translations, this essay surveys how Bible translations produced by Western Christian missionaries distorted African cultures and religions, with special attention to the Shona people of Zimbabwe. It explains how the specific name for the Shona god, Mwari, became the name for the biblical god called Elohim in colonial-sexist translations and what this hermeneutical move has meant for the Shona people. The essay also discusses the specific cases of Gen. 1:26–27 and Gen. 2:4b–3:24 in the Shona translations. A conclusion summarizes the main findings and presents an outlook on further research done by African feminist Bible translators and interpreters.

The Problem of Colonial Bible Translations in Africa

The translation of the Christian Bible into African languages is intricately tied to the colonial agenda that has aimed to dispossess African peoples of their

cultures, traditions, and resources. Missionaries converted African peoples to a Christianity closely identified as Western in nature and form. Bible translations into African languages have been part of this long and arduous project that continues to this day. Musa W. Dube observes aptly the interrelationship between globalization and imperialism when she explains:

> If we understand postcolonialism as underlining the fact that relationships of domination and subordination that were created in modern imperialism did not end when geographical independence was won, then globalization is a "mutation," a new form of an old problem. Indeed, if we regard modern colonialism and other forms of imperialism as the search for markets and for profit making, by extending one's influence beyond their national borders, then the relation of globalization is evident.[2]

Various Bible translation organizations, such as the Wycliffe Global Alliance, SIL, and the United Bible Societies, operate in Africa even today. As during the colonial period, the Bible is still seen as a central tool in the aggressive spreading of the Christian faith in Africa. The replacement of all indigenous cultures continues to be the key marker of those efforts. For instance, the Wycliffe Global Alliance considers Bible translations as critical to making disciples of every nation, and so the Alliance wants to see a translation started for every language group that needs one by the year 2025.[3] In other words, the goal of suppressing African religions and cultures is not a thing of the past but still the aim of many Bible translation organizations. They still want to religiously and culturally colonize Africa.

The equation of the Christian faith with Western culture has strongly influenced the translation of the Bible in sub-Saharan Africa. Hermeneutical decisions ensured the undermining of African cultures, beliefs, and practices. The translation of demons as *Badimo* (ancestors) in early missionary Setswana translations is a case in point.[4] Indigenous African religions attributed a positive and superior position to one's ancestors. Yet colonial Bible translations literally demonized them. Even worse, missionaries adopted the names of the African deities for the biblical God and so denied and suppressed the African conception and identity of the local deities.[5] The linguistic deformations in the colonial Bible translations violated African cultures, languages, and peoples by devaluing the indigenous traditions. What became sacred and worthy of preservation was that which was deemed to be compatible to Western Christian faith, which was very minimal. Even in the current era of globalization, African cultures and traditions are still regarded as inferior to those of the West. African cultures and religions are still targeted for wholesale obliteration, as many people, including African people, still assume that African traditions do not articulate the true

nature of God. Colonial Bible translations are thus still revered as the best and most authentic ways of talking about God and religion.[6]

Another difficulty relates to the fact that missionaries are often credited with the preservation of African languages because they put those languages into writing. Yet the missionaries re-created African languages to suit their colonial desires that aimed to destroy African cultures and identities. As Dube asserts: "A language is a culture. A language is a text or canon that bears the culture and culture is language."[7] Although missionaries relied on Africans, especially African men, and used them as walking dictionaries, they re-created African languages to accommodate their evangelizing agenda. When the missionaries deemed African words as incompatible with their views about the Christian faith, they "Africanized" European expressions and words. For instance, they rendered the Hebrew noun *nabi'* into *muprofita* and *moporofeti* in the Shona and Setswana Bibles respectively, adding prefixes to the basic English word of the noun, because they found the Shona and Setswana equivalents for "prophet" too barbaric and heathen-influenced.[8]

One of the most significant shortcomings of the colonial Bible translations, however, is the fact that the English translation of the King James Version served as the foundation for African translations but not the original Hebrew or Greek texts. Even today, when indigenous speakers are involved in the translation process, revisions and new Bible translations are usually based on Western hermeneutical theories. Jeremy Punt points out assumptions of Western supremacy in African Bible translations when he explains: "The UBS [United Bible Societies] would insist, for example, on having one of their consultants on the translation team and that their 'recommended and supplied' commentaries be consulted."[9] Secrecy is another feature permeating Bible translating culture, and so it is usually impossible to know the demographics of the employed Bible translators and consultants. Yet in most Bible translation organizations evangelical conservative theologians govern and support the various projects, and translation consultants are Western scholars who oversee poorly skilled teams of indigenous translators. Usually, the work excludes academically credentialed African Bible scholars, as S. V. Coertze deduces from a questionnaire distributed to a random group of SIL translators when he explains: "All the African biblical interpreters could be considered as ordinary biblical interpreters, some of whom without having completed primary school requirements."[10] The exclusion, even shunning, of African Bible scholars from Bible translation projects reflects the ulterior goal of the various missionary societies and organizations. They aim to convert Africans to the Christian faith

defined according to Western evangelical-colonial theologies.

Finally, colonial Bible translations that Western missionaries published and distributed to African peoples across the continent of Africa were heavily shaped by patriarchal and sexist ideologies and theological convictions of women as secondary to men. All Christian missionaries hold on to strong gender prejudices and their Bible translations reflect this bias. Relegating African women to inferior positions and uplifting African men, colonial officials, and missionaries alike articulated and practiced disparaging and dehumanizing notions about all Africans but especially about African women. As Elizabeth Schmidt notes: "Colonial records are filled with adjectives characterizing African women as 'indolent,' 'lazy,' 'slothful,' 'immoral,' 'frivolous,' 'savage,' and 'uncivilized.'"[11] Colonial translators considered African women as unqualified to perform any kind of mission work. For instance, missionaries opposed employing Shona women as teachers or catechists, claiming that they would jeopardize the entire missionary project because "the women are too ignorant, too volatile, and feather-headed to allow them to be entrusted with such a charge."[12] Consequently, even today's Bible translation societies do not employ African women translators as much as African men translators. As Dube notes, the United Bible Society (UBS) hired only four women as consultants in 2016, and women translators constitute less than 4 percent for the entire continent of Africa.[13] Unsurprisingly, feminist hermeneutical ideas in the various Bible translations and revisions are systematically excluded in the ongoing aggressive spread of the Bible. In Africa male translators, unencumbered by feminist hermeneutical insights, produce officially recognized Bible translations to this very day.

The Development of Missionary Bible Translations for the Shona Peoples

The first missionary attempt to bring the Bible to the Shona people failed completely. It goes back to 1560 when a Portuguese Jesuit, Dançalo da Silveria, was killed before he had made any serious missionary impact in pre-colonial Zimbabwe. The Portuguese attempt was followed by the Congregationalist arrival in the 1870s and by the Dutch Reformed Church and the Berlin Missionary Society shortly thereafter. The Anglicans arrived in the 1880s. None of the Western missionary groups succeeded. Only after the British South Africa

Company under Cecil John Rhodes had successfully occupied Mashonaland did the different missionary societies begin to experience some success. All later missionary groups settled in regions in which African people spoke the different dialects of the Shona language. They included Karanga in the southern region, Manyika and Ndau in the eastern region, Zezuru in the central region, and Korekore in the northern region. The different dialects can be traced back to the earliest translation attempts, according to which each dialect appeared in the region in which the respective mission groups had settled. Like most other African societies, precolonial Shona cultures were oral and not literate, and so Western missionaries developed orthographies for their various Bible translations. Since Western missionaries preferred the New Testament over the Old Testament, their translations focused on the New Testament and Psalm 23.[14]

The missionaries translated portions of the Bible that they considered essential for the teaching of the Gospel message. Four versions of the New Testament existed by 1910. One was in ChiKaranga, another in Manyika, yet another in Zezuru, and still another in Ndau. Soon a common Shona Bible, based on a common orthography, was published. Hebert Chimhundu explains:

> The interest of the missionaries was certainly not academic or linguistic but evangelization. They needed a Bible that could be produced in one form that could be used in all the dialect areas, because producing different versions for each area would be too expensive for the respective population sizes. Support for publication was undertaken by the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SPCK) and the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS), which actually published a number of smaller items in the different dialects and orthographies. The missionaries also needed to produce vernacular readers, which they could use in their African schools. At the same time, the Native Department was also demanding that the language question should be settled in order to facilitate some of their administrative activities.[15]

The Shona Union orthography, a combination of Roman letters and symbols, was reached under the leadership of Clement Doke in 1929, and the government approved it in 1931.[16] The first Bible translation into Shona was the New Testament in 1941 and a complete Shona Union Bible appeared in 1949. It has since been revised in 1995 to remove the Doke symbols—*Bhaibheri Magwaro Matsvene a Mwari.* The Bible Society of Zimbabwe published a new translation in 1979; it is called *Bhaibheri: Chitenderano Chekare ne Chitenderano Chitsva.* Interestingly, however, the Shona peoples prefer the earlier translation to the new Shona orthography. They sense that the missionary Bible was never developed to learn from it but to teach them about Western notions about God and the Christian faith divorced from their indigenous experiences. The purpose of the missionary translations was the conversion of the Shona peoples and not mutual

exchange from two equal cultures.

The Identification of the Shona God with the Biblical God

Perhaps the most dramatic impact of the colonial-patriarchal Bible translations on the Shona cultures had to do with the abrupt Christianization of the Shona god, Mwari. Because the missionaries wanted to convert the Shona peoples to the biblical deity, they tried to make the biblical deity relevant and acceptable to the Shona peoples. Initially the missionaries were reluctant to identify the biblical deity with the Shona god. They erroneously deemed the Shona concept of god as lacking two essential characteristics of the biblical deity, namely to be the judge and the creator.[17] Thus, prior to the standardization of the Shona language from various Shona dialects, Western missionaries identified the biblical deity with various Shona terms. The Dutch Reformed missionaries used *Modzimo/Mudzimu*, which in Shona means "Ancestral Spirit."[18] They also used *Mudzimu Wedenga*, which means "Ancestral Spirit of the Sky."[19] The Catholic Jesuits preferred *Yave* because they wanted to maintain the distinction between Mwari and the biblical deity. In contrast, the Dominicans used Mwari from the start.[20] Similarly, Anglicans, Methodists, and other Christian Western latecomers, such as the Salvation Army, used exclusively the Shona divine name Mwari for the biblical deity.[21]

Yet after the standardization of the Shona language, all missionary branches identified the Shona deity Mwari with the biblical deity. Accordingly, the complete Union Shona Bible of the Hebrew and Greek Testaments that was published in 1949 utilized the Doke orthography and translated the biblical God as Mwari. Hence, the current translation of the Shona Bible declares in Gen. 1:1: "In the beginning Mwari created the heavens and the earth" (*Pakutanga Mwari akasika denga nenyika*). The Shona deity Mwari replaces the biblical deity, Elohim, without any further explanation. The translation simply replaces the Shona idea about Mwari with the biblical god. The colonizing translation has been utterly successful to this very day.

The adoption of the Shona name Mwari for the deity was also successfully implemented in other biblical texts. For instance, another name for the deity appears in Gen. 2:4b–3:24 where "Elohim" is combined with "Yhwh." In the earliest version of the complete 1950 Shona Bible, Yhwh is translated as

“Jehova/Jehovha.” Yet later revisions translate the Hebrew phrase “Yhwh Elohim” as “Jehovha Mwari.” Some Catholic liturgical and catechetical books translate Yhwh as “Yave,” as if the term is translated from the original Hebrew text. In the 1979 Shona translation, another term, *tenzi*, is introduced for Yhwh. The Shona noun “tenzi” appears in capitalized letters, TENZI, in apparent similarity to the rendering into “LORD” as it is done in English translations. However, the Shona noun “tenzi” means “master” and not “lord.” Edward R. Hope and Ignatius Chidavaenzi also aim for the proper equation of the Shona Mwari with the biblical god when they assert that Mwari means “the one who exists.”[22] In short, the use of the term “Mwari” in the creation narratives of the book of Genesis helps in cementing the equation of the Shona deity with the biblical god. Mwari turns into the biblical deity and, as a result, Mwari ceases to be the traditional god of the Shona and is divorced from the Shona cultural and religious contexts. Contemporary Shona people cannot even think of Mwari in non-biblical ways anymore. The conversion process has been total.

The Gendering of the Shona God in the Colonial Translations

The identification of the Shona deity Mwari with the biblical creator god had devastating implications for Shona culture. Mwari of the Shona tradition was originally a genderless and spiritual reality. Yet the colonial identification of the biblical god as Mwari turned the notion of the Shona deity into a tangible form. Moreover, it turned Mwari into a male deity. Other gendered notions changed Shona vocabulary as well. Missionaries began identifying the male human (*‘adam*) in the Bible with the noun for humanity, “munhu,” in Shona. The male becomes conflated with the human. As a consequence, the woman becomes excluded from the notion of humanity and, in fact, secondary to it. This enormous shift is most prominently expressed in the translation of Gen. 1:26–27. The verses juxtapose the Hebrew words of male (*zakar*) and female (*neqebah*) in the English translation, in the Shona Bible both words are translated as “man/husband” (*murume*) and “woman/wife” (*mukadzi*). If the original Hebrew had been the source text of the Shona translation, the words would have been translated as “male” (*hono/rume*) and “female” (*hadzi/kadzi*) respectively, without any reference to a heterosexual notion of sexuality. The translation would then be like this:

Saka Elohim (Mwari) akasika munhu ne mufananidzo wake.	Thus Elohim (God) created humanity in its image.
Mumufananidzo waElohim (waMwari) akamusika.	In the image of Elohim (of God) it created it.
Hono nehadzi akazvisika.	Male and female it created them.

However, the Shona Bible of 2002 offers the following translation:

Saka Mwari akasika munhu nomufananidzo wake,	So Mwari created humanity in his image.
akamusika mumufananidzo waMwari;	He created him in the image of Mwari.
akavasika murume nomukadzi.	He created them husband/man and wife/woman.

Clearly, then, the Shona translation of Gen. 1:26–27 results in a new and different conceptualization of the Shona deity as gendered. Most importantly, it introduces a rigid gender binary that did not exist in the pre-missionary Shona understanding of humanity or *munhu*. As a result of the colonial-patriarchal translation, rigid gender views become dominant in Shona life. The Shona peoples come to accept that humanity exists in the strict gender binary of female and male. The focus on maintaining the biblically prescribed rigid gender binary still informs the homophobic stance found in sub-Saharan Africa even today. In contrast, pre-colonial Africa had a flexible gender system and gender-bending practices that allowed the interchanging roles, functions, and power systems of both men and women. As Ifi Amadiume demonstrates in the context of the Igbo people of Nigeria, the binary view of gender did not exist in Africa prior to the colonial imposition of sexual difference as constructed in Western culture.[23] Thus, the translation of Gen. 1:26–27 into Shona introduced not only a Western gender ideology alien to African practice and thought but it also imposed Western gender norms onto African cultures with the power of the Bible. Rigid binary gender norms are thus difficult to uproot even today because missionary Bible translations introduced them and by now they are deeply enmeshed with African cultures.

The detrimental impact of the rigid binary gender system that Western colonial Bibles brought to the Shona peoples is even more visible in the translation of *ʻadam* in Gen. 2:4b–3:24. Apart from suppressing Shona etiologies, the colonial Bible translations introduced powerful patriarchal notions to the Shona culture that have been particularly detrimental to Shona women. It begins with the Shona translation of Gen. 2:7 where Mwari molds "Adam" (*munhu*, i.e. the human being) from the soil of the ground (*ivhu repasi*). The poetic connection in Hebrew between *ʻadam* and *ʻadamah* does not exist in the Shona translation because the Shona words for humanity (*munhu*) and for the ground (*pasi/ivhu*) are different by sound or linguistic origin. Yet in Hebrew it is clear that the human being (*ʻadam*) is a lump of soil (*ʻadamah*), brought to life by the breath of the deity. In the Shona translation, *munhu* is placed in the garden that the deity planted; *munhu* has the mandate to work the garden and to take care of it, with some limitation on the consumption from the trees of the garden (2:8–17).

The Shona translation of Gen. 2:4b–25 introduces the supremacy of the man and the inferiority of the woman, an utterly patriarchal notion. Accordingly, the Shona translation conflates *ʻadam* with "male." For instance, in Gen. 2:18 the deity states that it is not good for *munhu* to be alone. The deity also wants to remedy the shortcoming by making "a helper fit for him" (*mubatatsiri akamumukwanira*). This translation of the Hebrew phrase, *ezer kenegdo*, is usually translated into English as "a helper fit for him," indicating that *munhu* is no longer imagined as a human that Gen. 1:27 defines as both female and male. Rather, in Gen. 2:22 *munhu* refers exclusively to the male (*murume*), and so the Shona Bible reads: "God made woman from the rib taken from the human, and then brought her to the man" (*akaita mukadzi kubva parumbavhu rwaakanga a bvisa pamunhu, uye akamuuyisa kumurume*). In v. 22, the Hebrew text introduces the nouns, *ʻish* and *ʻishshah*, that are usually translated as "man" and "woman" in English. The morphological relationship between the two words is evident in both Hebrew and English, but in Shona no morphological connection exists between the Shona terms, *murume* and *mukadzi*. Hence, the claim that *mukadzi* was derived from *murume* implies that the humanness of the *mukadzi* is dependent on her connection to the *murume*. According to the stated purpose, the woman, *mukadzi*, is a suitable helper for the man, *murume*, who is identified as the human in the equation. Moreover, the woman is made of less than the man because she is made from the rib of the man. In the colonial-patriarchal translation of this verse, the woman's inferiority and her subordination to the man is thus designed by Mwari, and hence her subordination and secondary status become an undisputed ultimate reality.

It gets worse. The translation of Gen. 2:4b–25 does not only prescribe the woman's subordination and secondary status, but it also introduces the colonial-patriarchal ideology of heteronormativity into Shona culture. In the translation of this biblical text heterosexuality appears as the only divinely legitimate expression of sexuality that privileges male sexuality. In fact, it depicts male sexual pleasure as the sole purpose for woman who is characterized as man's possession. The male has sexual autonomy whereas the woman's sexuality belongs to the man.

Furthermore, the submission of the woman (*mukadzi*) to the man (*murume*) is reinforced in Gen. 3:16 in which her submission results from her eating the fruit from the forbidden tree in the divinely planted garden (Gen. 2:10–17). The original Hebrew text depicts the patriarchal idea that women deserve the pain of childbirth when the deity prescribes it to the woman: "I will greatly increase your pain in conception, you will give birth to children in pain" (*Ndichawanza zvikuru kurwadziwa kwako nokutora mimba kwako, uchabereka vana uchirwadziwa*). Yet the Shona translation goes even further when it depicts the supremacy and domination of the husband/man over the wife/woman in the last portion of the verse: "Your will shall be to your husband, he will be your lord" (*kuda kwako kuchava kumurume wako, iye achava ishe wako*). Certainly, Western patriarchal ideology influenced this translation because the Hebrew pronoun, *hû'*, could be translated as "it" rather than "he." More significantly, however, the Shona translation inserts a noun, *ishe* (lord), that does not appear in the original Hebrew text. The insertion of this noun expands the limited context of the etiology by explaining female heterosexuality and by broadening its application to the general status of women in relationship to men in Shona society.

The patriarchal and heteronormative view of sexuality that privileges the male was not part of precolonial Africa. Yet Western missionaries considered this Western construct of sexuality as civilized and normative whereas they regarded the sexual ideas and practices of the Shona people, as in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, as barbaric and incompatible with their Western notions of the Christian faith. Since early missionaries knew very little of African beliefs and practices, they were convinced that African cultures were incompatible with Christianity.[24] They translated the Bible to introduce and fortify Western supremacy and patriarchy into African cultures. Thus, the notion of woman as derived from man goes back to the colonial-patriarchal translation of Genesis 2. Initially, it made no sense in Shona epistemology and society. Yet, over time, even the non-Christianized Shona peoples came to accept biblical notions about

the deity, gender, and heterosexuality as normative and mandatory, having been indoctrinated systematically that their indigenous traditions are barbaric and worthless.

Toward Postcolonial-Feminist Bible Translations in Africa: A Conclusion

The history of Bible translation in Africa reflects its colonial context and purpose. As an arm of the empire, the missionary weapon was the Bible because the Bible was the most important and powerful weapon in the conversion of Africans to Christianity. For the weapon to be effective, however, it had to be translated into the indigenous languages. To make the biblical god acceptable to Africans, missionaries adopted the African indigenous names for their deities. As the Shona context shows, the adoption of Mwari as the biblical god severed Mwari from the Shona cultural and religious contexts. Mwari was changed from being a genderless spirit to a male god. Even worse, the biblical stories that now mention Mwari introduced a concept of heterosexuality and heteronormativity that did not exist in African cultures. It also introduced patriarchal ideologies about the social status of women in relationship to men that resulted in the compounded marginalization of women in Africa. The Shona translation of Gen. 1:26–27 and Gen. 2:1–3:24 introduced and emboldened homophobic, heteronormative, and heterosexual prejudices that have contributed to so much suffering in Africa.

Bible translations in Africa continue to be influenced heavily by colonizing ideologies of evangelization. They are part of ventures that are designed to promote Christianity and Western cultural and religious ideas, and that still operate with the goal of obliterating African cultures and religions. Biblical scholars have to be vigilant not only in critiquing early missionary translations but even today's translation projects. Today all Bible societies and translation organization are conservative and evangelical in their nature and goals. There is no organization that translates the Bible in Africa independent from conversion goals. Bible translations need to be interdisciplinary endeavors that take place at universities and do not promote Christianity. The academic approach requires multiple disciples, including biblical, linguistic and cultural, and feminist postcolonial studies.

Most importantly, indigenous meanings of African languages have to be

recovered. Hijacked in African missionary Bible translations, African terms reinforce patriarchal concepts that are not original to African cultures. Above all, the practice of adopting African indigenous names for deities in Bible translation need to cease. The gods of Africa need to be decolonized through the same way they were colonized, in Bible translation, but this time on the basis of feminist postcolonial translation principles.

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CHAPTER 5

QUEER BIBLE READINGS IN GLOBAL HERMENEUTICAL PERSPECTIVE

JEREMY PUNT

ENTRENCHED heteronormative and homophobic positions in society and the academy hamper responsible engagement with biblical texts on the African continent. Questionable hermeneutics lead to claims that homosexuality is unbiblical and un-African, and generate readings of the Bible that are both homophobic and misogynist. The prevailing and continuing impact of what can be broadly called traditionalist Western scholarship on African biblical scholarship has meant the underdevelopment of critical biblical hermeneutics. African biblical scholars benefit greatly from queer biblical criticism because the latter provides hermeneutical tools to explore broader understandings of sex and gender, for the historical shaping of these categories and especially for their relevance and importance for biblical interpretation.

Feminist theory strongly influenced gender criticism, especially since feminist inquiry in the 1980s and 1990s broadened its horizons beyond projects about the social history and "recovery of women." This development enabled different approaches to the study of gender. Still, gender studies cannot be equated with feminist studies, since it includes feminist theory, feminist criticism, and women's studies, as well as men's or masculinity studies. As an umbrella term, gender studies also include lesbian and gay studies and queer theory. Queer thinking comprises a queer positionality or stance, and is directed to more popular, often religiously minded or even ecclesial contexts. Queer theory, in the narrower sense, takes a more academic line to queer thinking for

which it has developed a theoretical apparatus. My focus is on queer theory as part of the ongoing work on the rhetorical construction of men and women, femininity and masculinity, gender in texts and discourse, as well as investigations of the social forces at work in all of these.

Queer theory is generally taken to be inspired by Michael Foucault, often associated with the theoretical work of philosophers and sociologists such as Judith Butler, Gayle Rubin, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Jeffrey Weeks. It flows from the experiences of a new generation of LGBTQIA* (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer, intersex, asexual, and other), feminist, and civil right activists. Teresa de Lauretis, a feminist film scholar, coined the term "queer theory" in 1991 to move beyond simplistic binaries and static, isolated, and often identitarian categories of sex and gender, to challenge ideological confines of this categorization. Queer theory destabilizes sexual identities and counters cultural prejudice against sexual minorities, such as those from the LGBTQIA* communities. Close association with the study of homosexuality means queer work also engages with presuppositions and theories that advance heterosexual prerogatives, fixed gender identities, and popular and academic notions of gender, sex, and sexuality. Queer theory challenges the paradigmatic system of meaning that produces heterosexuality and homosexuality and treats religious ideas as the cultural means of production for that system.

Like queer theory, queer biblical criticism is an umbrella term for critical approaches encapsulated by it. Scholars such as Deryn Guest, Ken Stone, or Mona West and queer theologians such as Marcella Althaus-Reid, Gerard Loughlin, and Adrian Thatcher have promoted queer biblical criticism since the 2000s. Queer approaches engage biblical texts from the position that sex and gender are constructed, fluid, and complex categories. They include lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersexed perspectives and experiences, identities, and social locations. Queer biblical readings challenge the complacent acceptance of traditional sex and gender assumptions which govern biblical interpretation and heteronormative readings. Queer biblical criticism is thus characterized by destabilizing sexual identities and countering cultural prejudice against sexual minorities. It also lifts up what is considered different, abnormal, or even perverse in biblical texts, and resists theoretical frameworks on which such categories rely in order to contest accompanying claims of identity, power, and control.[1]

This essay presents developments in queer biblical hermeneutics as they have occurred in biblical studies since the early 2000s. Several sections organize the discussion. First, the essay explores queering and queerying readings as key

categories in queer biblical hermeneutics. Second, the essay explains how queer biblical theorists (de)construct sex and gender rendering a queer liminality. Third, the essay presents how queer exegetes unravel established notions of fixed identity in the Bible and why such work matters. Fourth, the essay describes how queer biblical scholars contest biblical heteronormativity. Fifth, the essay discusses how the Bible becomes indecent literature in the hands of queer readers. Sixth, the essay analyzes why queer scholars outwit normative notions about sex and gender. Seventh, the essay illustrates that these exegetes also queer the interpretation history of the Bible. A conclusion summarizes the main arguments, holding that the Bible and its interpretation are indeed queer.

Queering and Queerying as Liminal Exegetical Practice

The first major development that has emerged in queer biblical studies relates to two major categories. They pertain to queering and querying the Bible. "Queering" refers to investigations into the social construction of sex and gender, and "queerying" moves one step further, tracing the theoretical and political interests of such constructions, and their involvement in social dynamics and power. These two dimensions of queer readings are often both present at the same time, signaled by the use of the term queer(y)ing. Queer readings differ from lesbigay (liberation) readings, as queer theorists are skeptical about the reach of the "gay liberation" project. Such work relates to the "ethical grammar" for gay and lesbian theologies. While lesbigay biblical interpretation may search for corrective cores, the true meaning of texts and displacing straight androcentrism, queer biblical interpretation celebrates polyvalent texts and disavows hermeneutical centers as such. The conscious opposition to dominating heterosexual norms shapes the queer scholarly grammar. In fact, the rejection of heteronormativity initiates the challenge to the binary of homosexuality and heterosexuality, making their related ethical particularities obsolete.

Queer theorists tend to move a step further and emphasize the importance of re-imagining the world that goes beyond lesbigay "liberation."[2] For instance, Timorthy R. Koch suggests that queer biblical readings surpass gay liberation.[3] As Koch reflects on gay men's social practice of "cruising" in pubs, he shows that biblical readings evolve in the readerly interaction with biblical texts. It is

like cruising in bars with many unexpected shifts and turns with various conversation partners and encounters. Accordingly, Koch characterizes Elijah as a hairy leather man (2 Kgs. 1:2–8). He views Elisha as not to be baited (2 Kgs. 2:23–25), Jehu as a zealous man (2 Kgs. 10:12–17), and Ehud as an erotic judge (Judg. 3:12–16). Koch does not resolve any of the exegetical tensions generated by opponents of queer theory, and he does not minimize the political responsibility of biblical readers. Instead, he advances a political commitment of his approach in the postcolonial world. To Koch, hope for a queer future is not only self-indulgent but political. Although opponents to a queer hermeneutical stance accuse proponents of being too generic in purpose, the political impact is considerable. As Judith Butler asserts: "The deconstruction of identity is not the deconstruction of politics; rather, it establishes as political the very terms through which identity is articulated."[4] Similar to the lesbigay hermeneutic, then, queer biblical readers insist on the political nature of their biblical readings. They question the ostensible stability of heteronormative social patterns by pointing out its constructed nature and the destabilizing and political potential of queer hermeneutics.

Unfortunately, the manifold advances made by exegetes who queer and queery the Bible are mostly ignored in the field of biblical studies. Still, the advances in queer hermeneutics are impressive and the effects of the sex- and gender-obfuscating notions that this interpretation more strongly affects the control and regulation of sex and gender than most scholars are willing to admit. Queer exegetes, for instance, insist that queer Bible readers assume the text as fluid and interpretations as transgressing dominant norms and categories. More importantly, these readers presuppose that the silence(-ing) of biblical queerness is "a conscious effort to suppress *the truth* and has more to do with the dominant practices of biblical interpretation."[5] The queer challenge of dominant meanings makes room for liminal practices, which is the aim of queer interpretations. Thus, liminality and queerness feed off each other. Queer interpretations give liminality queerness and make queerness liminal.

Queer(y)ing Liminality: The (De)construction of Sex and Gender

Another development in queer biblical hermeneutics pertains to the important notion of querying liminality. It arises from the fluidity of sex and gender and is

related to the construction of sex and gender.[6] Queer theorists stress the fluidity of human sexuality. They scrutinize attempts to regulate it in intellectual categories and social practices. Queer theories explain that nothing about human sex and sexuality is (pre-)determined. They maintain that social and personal categories that structure and monitor sexuality are contingent on social location. The notion of the fluidity of sex gives impetus to the development of queering and queerying strategies. Queer interpreters assume that gender and sex are social constructs and not biologically or physiologically based notions. Queering gender and sex occurs when interpreters expose the systems and structures of convention that determine the form and function of sex and gender. Thus, the central queering claim is that gender and sex are manufactured entities. In this sense, queering interpretations impact identity and social dynamics in many ways.[7]

Queer interpreters also refer to queer theory as "queerying" when they take social constructionism a step further. Queerying takes account of the theoretical and political interests at work. It is about the study of social dynamics and power play in regard to sex and gender. Queer interpreters *queery* texts when they identify those who benefit from sex and gender constructions. When exegetes utilize queer theory, they engage both queering and querying strategies. Thus, queering, which is focused on the construction of gender and sex, and querying, which emphasizes power interests, are interrelated.

Queer biblical interpretation destabilizes sex and gender in biblical texts by constructing liminal identities and refusing to confirm essentialist identities.[8] Queer interpretations produce portrayals of sex and gender that put people and even God into liminal positions. These interpretations re-define, re-describe, and re-inscribe power because they acknowledge how biblical texts regulate power and control through sex. Thus, the reciprocal relation between queering and liminality means that liminality results from the queering of sex while liminality induces queered sexualities. In other words, the interrelationship of sex and gender, as well as of power and control highlight each of these elements. The interrelationship compels contemporary interpreters to source appropriate theoretical apparatuses with which to investigate sex and gender as well as power and control, both as important issues in themselves and jointly for being mutually informing elements in the interpretation process.

Queer theorists explore liminality through visible and hidden gaps and indeterminacies in biblical texts. In fact, queer theorists invite alternative readings in which liminality features prominently. At times, liminality and marginality also become empowering perspectives.[9] Liminality remains a

slippery concept, however, especially when theorists (re)claim marginality as a place of radical openness and possibility.[10] In the hands of queer theorists, the liminality of queer reading results in unsettled and indecent interpretations. They also usurp hermeneutical power and control, unravel identity, and challenge heteronormativity.

Unravelling Identity

The third major development characterizing queer biblical hermeneutics relates to the notion of unravelling identity. This concept follows the queer contestation of seemingly stable sex and gender categories. It has become common to see sex and gender as major components informing human personality and identity, particularly in regard to femininity and masculinity and notions of the sexual self. The queering approach to texts focuses on the construction of sex and gender, the fluidity of such categories and the resulting liminality of sexed and gendered bodies. Queer theory's relationship to identity, then, is not promotional of a specific array of rival identities with which to construct oppositional politics. Rather, the queer position refuses coherent identities promoted by neoliberalism or related practices that identity politics construe. Queer theory disrupts and politicizes normal relations between and among sex, gender, bodies, sexuality, and desire. In fact, the "anti-identitarianism" of queer theory creates alternative possibilities for investigation that energize queer scholarship.

Queer theory's disavowal of fixed identities does not nullify its concerns about the conceptualization of identity. Instead, it refocuses attention on its ever changing and non-material conceptualization. Queer theory's relationship with the politics of identity is uneasy and variable. While scholars such as Monica Wittig consider homosexuality a metaphysical category, Judith Butler sees a link between the fluidity of the term queer and its usefulness. Butler insists that the term "can never be fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from previous usage."[11] For others, *queer* includes all notions of difference, as well as the difference of difference itself, assuming a Derridean-like *differance*. Queer theory questions fixed gender identity and associated categories, and it perceives identity as multiple, unstable and regulatory, and it celebrates difference. As Butler maintains, the deconstruction of identity provides the politics for articulating identity.[12]

For instance, in the Hebrew Bible, the male patriarchs identify with the

people of ancient Israel. Simultaneously, they see themselves as the consort of God. Thus, Gerard Loughlin maintains that the patriarchs are a wife to God, "who has entered into a marriage contract with them—as the prophets Hosea, Jeremiah and Ezekiel testify—and who ravishes them."[13] The Hebrew Bible's narrative undermines the staunch masculine identity associated with fatherhood. This identity-unsettling image is taken further, becoming more radical in expression. Ezek. 16:6–9 provides a detailed, graphic description wherein the relationship between God and Israel is sexually consummated. Loughlin states: "God washes away the blood of Israel's 'deflowering'; and male circumcision becomes the mark, in her flesh, of God's possession."[14] The consequence of inscribing God sexually, or at least ascribing sexuality to God, means that the depiction of God queers the men of Israel. They are like women in their relationship to God or, perhaps even stronger, they are like men sleeping with men as with women (see Lev. 18:20).[15] Their gender identity unravels in front of the readerly eyes.

Queer theorists, striving to unravel identity formed through conventionalized sex and gender patterns, show that the powerful establish and maintain themselves by eliminating the subjugated and the weak. Queer theorists agree with feminist and Foucauldian thought that the erasure of the subjugated creates the dominant. Alert to the unravelling of sexual identities, queer interpreters challenge Hebrew Bible scholarship that justifies modern normativities and heteronormativity in particular. Clearly, heterosexism is a social construct that sustains its normativity by constructing itself in opposition to homosexuality. Ironically, however, the term heterosexuality enters the English language only after the invention of the term homosexuality. For a long time, people used ancient texts for which homosexual or heterosexual did not exist either as categories or as ground for opinions about such categories. In fact, in the past a wide variety of same-sex practices informed by class (slavery), power (war and conquest), social convention (pederasty), and other situations and conditions prevailed. Consequently, queer theorists challenge heterosexist thought despite its centuries-lasting dominance in human societies.

Challenging (Contemporary) Heteronormativity

A fourth development that has been central in queer Bible hermeneutic is the

challenge of contemporary norms of heteronormativity. Queer interpreters challenge proponents that use biblical texts to justify heteronormative practices. The multi-focal orientation of interpreters, constituted by personal, structural, societal, and academic considerations, can become so narrow that it merely re-inscribes patriarchy and conventional gender norms, rather than queering and queerying textual meanings. Queer theorists, exploring the gap between modern assumptions framed by normativities, often contest the broad footprint of heteronormativity. These scholars offer examples that unpack the assumptions feeding into heteronormativity, informed by the Bible and Western culture in the social design of the human body, complete with a sense of individual bodily identity and with (the bodies of) other people. In a sense, therefore, heteronormativity relies on assumptions about gender and sexuality. Traditionalists claim that they are derived from the Bible. Alternatively, queer theorists show that they are imposed on the Bible. Scholarly normativity maps the body and sexually colonizes it through the emphasis on the difference of gender and sexuality. Such mapping and controlling relied on the construction of binary opposites, such as man-woman, virgin-harlot, clean-unclean, or heterosexual-homosexual.

While queer theory anticipates and even celebrates sex and gender differences, heteronormativity relies upon established and fixed sex and gender patterns. In all its disruptiveness and transgressiveness, queer theory produces difference through questioning conventional and anticipating alternatives.[16] It disrupts stable and normal categories that convention offers as normative sexual identities, going beyond categories such as male and female, thereby challenging heteronormativity. With reference to Jonathan's incorporation of intimacy, love, and commitment in his friendship with David, Heacock describes Jonathan's and David's relationship as a challenge to normative heteronormative, masculine ideals of male friendship over against the hegemonic discrepancies between normal and perverse, gay and straight, or friend and lover.[17] In addition to the disruption of the stability and apparent naturalness or givenness of heterosexuality, a queer reading also refuses to ascribe a "gay" identity to Jonathan. Heacock thus shows that the queer analysis also disturbs the notion of homosexuality as a stable signifier for homosexual, lesbigay, and transgendered men and women. Above all, the queer unsettling of homosexual stability plays havoc with heteronormativity, which relies on the former's stability to maintain itself.

Queer readings challenge textually assumed heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is responsible for the naturalization of masculinity and

femininity as categories. It is also responsible for those hegemonic patterns that determine the conventional categories of masculinity and femininity. Heteronormativity determines many textual conventions that generalize the center that turn straight men and masculinity into the universal ideal. In contrast, queer readers uncover queer textual centers, i.e. women, femininity, and LGBTQIA* folks, presenting them as no longer deviant, secondary, and inferior. In this fashion queer criticism is a hermeneutical position that refers to the outside of the norm. Theoretically, queer theory is related to feminist and postcolonial theories, as they emphasize the constructed nature of supposedly stable identities, such as homosexuality, heterosexuality, race, nationality, woman, or man. For instance, queer readings of the Genesis accounts recover the androgynous portrayal of the first human. They explain that an all-inclusive gender describes God in Gen. 1:26; 5:1–2. Given the importance of gender for the socio-cultural worldviews, conventions, and constructions of communities and societies, the dual-gendered depiction of God contributes to destabilizing and counter-cultural notions. It also challenges the prevailing male-female gender constructions. Unsurprisingly, the earliest Jewish commentaries on Genesis refer to Adam as created in the likeness of God and thus as at first intersexed creature.[18]

As queer Bible critics increasingly challenge heteronormativity in biblical texts and traditions, they have also destabilized prevailing assumptions about proper sexual and gendered behavior. Queer Bible critics thus agree with queer theorists that the binary of masculinity and femininity is a social construction, serving political hegemonic purposes other than reflecting the inevitable nature of men or women, as it is proclaimed with references to a divinely ordained Bible. In contrast to dominant readings that attribute binaries such as strong-weak, intelligent-stupid, or outgoing-domestic to men and women respectively, the book of Genesis portrays Jacob’s gender performance as not befitting a man in ancient Israel. Jacob associates primarily with his mother and lives in her domestic space. He cooks! Yet in spite of his non-traditional portrayal, Jacob and not his very manly brother Esau becomes Israel’s eponymous ancestor. Similarly, Joseph dresses in a colorful princess robe, thereby casting him in an atypical role for a man. Another example appears in the story about Lot’s daughters who are sexually resourceful in their effort to ensure their progeny. Likewise, the wife of Potiphar treats Joseph as a sexual object and not the other way around (Gen. 19:30–38; 39:1–23). The zeal and phallocentric overtones when Jael and the woman of Thebez kill men (Judg. 4:17–22; 10:50–54) also render the standard heteronormative binaries uncertain. Such queering instances in the biblical

narrative show both the constructed nature of sex and gender categories cited in support of heteronormativity, and the inherent instability of these categories.

Heteronormative renderings do not present the sum-total of the Hebrew Bible. Queer Bible theorists challenge contemporary heteronormativity by highlighting the ideological, ingrained thought-patterns on which heteronormativity is built. Queer interpreters queer the perceived, conventional "non-difference" of heteronormativity, what is so often presented as both natural and (therefore) divinely ordained. Heteronormative assumptions, however, are not "natural," "normal," or "common-sense." Rather, they are socially constructed and imbued with power-interests. Queer theorists denounce the portrayal of sexuality as a universal and eternal drive as one of the central assumptions of heteronormativity. This universalized portrayal is a mainstay of heteronormativity, but it creates a false impression since sexuality and erotic desire exist only within history. It makes sense only within historical contexts. Queer interpretation thus not only questions the liberal attempt to bestow normalcy on queerness. It also proceeds in queering and queerying normalcy itself. The real issue pertains to the process of normalization since the goal of queer political movement is not assimilation but deconstruction, disruption, and questioning normality itself. Queer theorists challenge the notion of gender dimorphism because they do not regard people as either male or female.

INDECENT QUEERING

Since the 2000s, a fifth development, shaping queer bible hermeneutics, relates to the assertion that queer indecency or indecent queering facilitate alternative biblical readings. For instance, humor aids the transgressing of sex and gender borders. Rahab's role in Joshua 2 is not only humorous, it borders on being indecent. As a sex-worker, Rahab is defined by her public sexual availability. She is also the protagonist in the narrative. The frequent portrayal of the Canaanite identity as non-heteronormative in the Hebrew Bible and Rahab's ambiguous support and subversion of the Israelite antipathy toward Canaanites turn her into a trickster rather than a heroine.[19] Such a queer reading not only challenges heteronormativity but moves in the direction of indecency. The female sex-worker receives a central but gender-transgressive role in a narrative dominated by a somewhat ambiguous warrior masculinity.

The prophetic marriage metaphor in the Hebrew Bible is even clearer in its allusion to indecent queering. Conventional interpretations merely absorb and

normalize this metaphor. The prophets use contentious sexual and marital images among male-dominated audiences. They challenge the gender dynamics between texts, original audiences, and contemporary readers. Yet a queer reading is alert to literary cues and feminist concerns and so disturbs the marriage metaphor of Jeremiah 2–3, Hosea 2, and Ezekiel 16 and 23. Indecent queering uncovers the gender performativity at work in these texts.[20] Moreover, an indecent reading queers Ezekiel 23 and its emphasis on male ejaculation by exposing the text as male fantasy about female desire. The texts also works with the humorous undertones of the exaggeration of Oholibah's sexual perversity.[21] Erotic and graphic descriptions do not only shift positionalities but also the focus in the text from Oholibah or Israel to the narrator or Yahweh. The identification of the originally male audience with the unfaithful and faithful wife challenges the marriage metaphor as the basis for heterosexual relations and marriage. It debunks traditionally heteronormative assumptions. The challenge to the marriage metaphor even extends to the New Testament that uses the metaphor theologically for Jesus Christ and the church.

Contextual theologian, Marcella Althaus-Reid, contributed significantly to advancing the indecent position. She demonstrates how to interpret the Hebrew Bible from the perspective of pubis-theology. Claiming the biblical God as a God of history and resurrections, she allows for permutations in biblical interpretation, stating:

> Permutations are related to genderfucking (gender exchanges) or transsexualism (sexual exchanges) but also to economic processes. Reading God and prostitution in the Scriptures permutes first of all the partners in dialogue from the prostitute and the religious community of sexual authority in the Bible to the prostitute and God. Second, the dialogue is between God and Godself, because Queer theologies consider relationships as the ground from which we think God.[22]

An indecent queer reading of God's theophany to Hagar in the wilderness and the narrative of Rahab from the perspective of pubis-theology combines sexual and economic exclusion.[23] Some theologians appreciate indecent theology for examining the divine masquerade bolstered by forms of Christian theology. It removes charades that are facades, concealing the full range of expressing the divine. Queer biblical interpretation exposes and unnerves the pretense of dominance, and makes room for other perspectives to be heard. In this way queer biblical readings become a hermeneutic that outwits the socio-political status quo.

Queer as Outwitting

A sixth concept that is central in queer biblical studies is the notion of "outwitting" that produces readings that go against engrained readings and promotes alternative meanings. Queer theorists reclaim the notion of outwitting from its original derogatory use to refer to perverse acts. In queer Bible readings, outwitting inverts the word's original meanings by reversing the insult and by moving from ascribed shame to claimed pride. Queer(y)ing biblical texts signifies the outwitting of heteronormative meanings. The concept enables queer readers to decode biblical normalization when they subvert the supposedly normal textual meaning, reveal it as a construct, and expose the difference from the norm. Outwitting goes beyond restorative projects because queer theory reclaims a broader spectrum of marginal and minority interests. Ironically, "[i]t finds itself curiously central to culture at large, disavowed but necessary for a heterosexual normalcy that defines itself in terms of what it rejects."[24] In this sense, queer outwitting accomplishes more than a reclamation of identity. It goes beyond it. Loughlin describes this strategic focus when he explains:

> Queer seeks to outwit identity. It serves those who find themselves and others to be other than the characters prescribed by an identity. It marks not by defining, but by taking up a distance from what is perceived as the normative. The term is deployed in order to mark, and to make, a difference, a divergence.[25]

Many biblical passages illustrate the outwitting of heteronormative readings or "outing the Bible." For instance, queer interpreters reclaim Isa. 56:1–8 by emphasizing that, in ancient Israel, eunuchs amounted to more than castrated males. This text makes a promise to men that does not endorse their exclusion from communities based on their inability to father children. In fact, the promise to the eunuchs supersedes the otherwise dominant focus on producing children. The text suggests that the promise to eunuchs extends to excluded men and women as they are part of sexual minorities. Since in ancient times eunuchs were subversive go-betweens among the aristocracy or elite, queer interpreters refer to them with contemporary terms, such as "berdache," "two-spirited," or "shamans." Eunuchs turn into queer ancestors of faith for contemporary queer Bible readers.[26]

The strategy of outwitting offers another exegetical advantage to queer Bible readers. It enables interpreters to resist the mapping of bodies that would create restrictive and oppressive readings. Certain biblical texts are resistant to the

notion that desire calls bodies into being and allows their categorization. For instance, Lev. 18:22, one of the so-called six-shooter or clobber texts traditionally used to denigrate lesbigays, does not refer to bodies from the perspective of desire. Instead, it reads from the perspective of the bodies' sexual use. In a context in which a male penetrated body signifies its feminization and challenges the male-dominated social order, a penetrated male body also confronts discourses of male power. It uncovered the fabricated nature of masculinity and exposed its misogynist premises. Queer(y)ing Lev. 18:22 outwits heteronormativity and its male biases. As Steffan Mathias explains:

> If Lev. 18.22 is a fear of a disavowal of male phallic power, then an embrace of the rhetoric of the text and of the actual act it prohibits in order to control offers a kind of self-shattering, a rejection of the self, the self which the text and the reader constantly try and protect to regulate and control their relations to others.[27]

Simply put, this reading reclaims passivity as the positive abdication of power.

Queer outwitting also moves beyond insider/outsider rhetoric, and resists the writing of texts onto bodies, so common in patriarchal interpretations. Queer interpreters dis-recognizes established rhetoric, and resist the textual imposition on bodies. They allow for a critical approach not only to social identity and location but also to social systems and institutions. Queer theory's outwitting is characterized by its moving away from traditional understandings of identity. It even takes a step away from the unravelling of identity because it does not connect difference to biological, national, or cultural essentialism. Queer outwitting relies on teasing out the intricate intersectionalities because people engage in many diverging discourses, practices, and institutions. Queer outwitting thus plays out in different ways and also shows up in the interpretation history of the Bible, destabilizing the binary self-evidence of power and marginality, center and periphery.

Queer(y)ing Reception

Seventh, and finally, queer biblical interpretation history does not romanticize the ancient as a model for the present. Indeed, queer biblical readers function within an academy and amidst scholarship where conventional and heteronormative practices prevail. Queer biblical interpreters perceive with different lenses, re-evaluating and appreciating often from a position of marginality and otherness. The socio-political position of males and

heterosexuals create a male-dominated, heterosexual social order that is perceived as normative. They claim that this social order is reflected and justified in biblical texts and traditions. The focus of queer theorists on difference interrogates strategies of marginalization and exclusion that sustain sexist and heteronormative biblical reception.[28] While queer theory, emphasizing difference, may disrupt the possibility for political solidarity in LGBTQIA* movements, it also offers the possibility to include and to recognize in its midst the voiceless, the marginalized, and the subordinated, the very basis of which is often race.

This political angle of queer work illustrates the importance of social location in queer studies of biblical interpretation history. Social location is not tantamount to personal identity. Although gay men and lesbian women often use queer theory, queer exegesis is not limited to queer readers and their sexual identities and practices of people employing queer hermeneutics. Queer studies destabilize what is considered normal, proper, or heteronormative performances of sex and gender. Still, social location is key in queer biblical interpretation because, as Jennings explains in his interpretation of Saul, Jonathan, and David, particular constructions of biblical characters depends on the hermeneutical insights of queer interpreters.[29]

The often stabilizing and normalizing effect of biblical interpretation histories requires more attention in queer exegesis. Queer gender dynamics are at work in textual reception histories. The Song of Songs illustrates this dynamic, starting with allegorical readings by Origen, followed by various Greek and Latin Church Fathers, but dramatically challenged by Martin Luther in the sixteenth century.[30] He overturned the allegorical, "queer" readings and fitted them into heteronormative parameters. Stephen Moore explains this dynamic in his characteristically witty fashion, stating: "The 'literal' reading of the Song, its reclamation from seventeen centuries of homoerotic exegesis and its transformation into an unmitigated celebration of heterosexual love and lust, is still in its infancy. The carnal interpretation of the Song still awaits its Origen."[31] From a queer(y)ing perspective, the interpretation history of the Song of Songs shows that heteronormative interpretation became dominant and still controls the interpretation of this biblical book.

Other biblical texts and their interpretation histories suggest similar developments when exegetes employ a queer(y)ing hermeneutical insights. For instance, the reading of the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative in Genesis 19 demonstrates the importance of studying reception history because it confirms that biblical interpreters never approach texts unencumbered and directly. It

becomes clear that an interpreter's involvement in complex and interrelated networks of meanings are constituted by the text, through the text, and as text. Challenging homophobic and misogynistic meanings, they favor readings advanced in the Jewish rabbinic tradition allowing for broader interpretations.[32] Another illustration, from Lamentations, shows how queer readers interpret this book as a resource for handling and even resisting the trauma of HIV and AIDS.[33] The queer study of biblical interpretation reception extends to other texts also, and other reading patterns that are sensitive to alternative sexual practices. For instance, Roland Boer discusses sadomasochism by means of an intricately styled dialogue that includes Yahweh featured in the Pentateuch. Similarly, Rowlett's rereading of the Samson and Delilah narrative also approaches the text from the perspective of sadomasochism.[34] All of these queer interpretations challenge the perspective of traditionally heteronormative biblical meanings. In sum, the task of queer(y)ing biblical interpretation history offers fertile possibilities to uncover and to recover biblical meanings that go far beyond the straight-jacket of heteronormativity.

Conclusion

Since the early 2000s, queer biblical scholarship has produced at least seven major approaches. They relate to queering and querying biblical texts, queer(y)ing liminality in the deconstruction of biblical sex and gender, unravelling gender identity in the Bible, challenging notions of heteronormativity, indecent queering, outwitting, and reworking interpretation histories. Importantly, the persuasiveness of queer biblical readings depends on its users and their social location. The conviction that heterosexuality is divinely commissioned, biblically underwritten, and thus the social norm has been counterproductive for understanding gender and sex in the Bible. Heterosexism is also detrimental to appreciating the full range of sexualities on the African continent, especially when it is wrapped in the pernicious and mythical claim that homosexuality is un-African and detrimental to African culture. This claim bows rigidly before the heteronormative onslaught from the West. It is dismissive of pre-colonial African heritage and the importance of a range of sexual behaviors and identities across cultural, social, and religious life in African societies. As queer biblical interpreters challenge the content of gender and sex categories, they question the very construction, nature, and use of heterosexist categories and systems of thinking related to sex and gender. Queer

biblical readings thus connect with studying the various intersectionalities such as ethnicity, race, or class.

The value of queer biblical interpretation is situated in redrawing the boundaries and critiquing, that is queer(y)ing, dominant discourse in society and the academy, in particular as it relates to gender and sexuality. Queer interpretation not only holds past readers to account for interpretive conventions, favoring patriarchy or reception histories privileging heteronormativity. It also unravels identities compromised by ideologies which are embedded in biblical texts, embedded not in the archaeological sense of waiting to be discovered but in the social convention sense of the prevailing and pervading influence and effect of language and custom. Queer interpretation is, after all, not only invested in hermeneutical methodology. It also debunks the conventional notion of a stable Bible since the idea of such biblical stability reciprocally serves to strengthen the heteronormative assumptions that contribute to notions of a fixed Bible in traditional biblical scholarship. This broader purview of queer interpretation deals with matters of power and control through sex and gender, and is used with other critical approaches, such as rhetorical, ideological, or postcolonial criticism. In the end, queer biblical exegesis, going beyond reconfiguring boundaries, reconceptualizes the nature, spectrum, and performance of gender and sex in relationship to other intersectional concepts.

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[1] "In recent years 'queer' has come to be used differently, sometimes as an umbrella term for a coalition of culturally marginal sexual self-identifications and at other times to describe a nascent theoretical model which has developed out of more traditional lesbian and gay studies"; see Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1996), 1.

[2] It is not difficult to understand the lesbigay criticism levelled against queer theory, as queer theory substitutes the particular for generic differences. However, while the move from the particular to the generic is seen to result in loss of political power, it retains the stigma associated with non-heteronormativity.

[3] See Timothy R. Koch, "Cruising as Methodology: Homoeroticism and the Scriptures," in *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Ken Stone (The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies, vol. 334; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 169–80.

[4] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Thinking Gender, vol. 2; New York, NY: Routledge, 1990), 148.

[5] Anthony Heacock, *Jonathan Loved David: Manly Love in the Bible and the Hermeneutics of Sex* (Bible in the Modern World, vol. 22; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2001), ix.

[6] In so far as queer theory investigates the fluidity of sexuality and sexual identities as concepts formulated and employed in our contemporary context, the use of queer theory in the discussion of first-century Mediterranean sex and gender is limited. The focus here is, rather, on queer theory's ability to provide analytical categories for the social construction of sex and gender, and its power plays.

[7] Homosexual identity, for example, challenges the patriarchal system whose interest in ownership outranks the importance of romantic love and commitment. Patriarchy requires monogamous security to safeguard the paternity of children, whereas women treasure the perceived security of monogamous relationships beyond their own interests. This situation often fuels rivalry with other women as possible contenders. In a patriarchal world, men expect women to exhibit an ethic of service that prioritizes male heterosexual desire.

[8] The sheer force, exerted by frequent repetition and enduring assumptions which secures conventional interpretation, resists such destabilization. In fact, conventional readings are often uncritical and almost unconsciously entrench a particular reading style.

[9] "The subversiveness of a religious system lies in its sexual subversions, in that disorderly core of abnormal sexual narratives where virgins give birth and male trinities may signify the incoherence of one male definition only in the tension between patriarchal identity and difference"; see Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (London / New York, NY: Routledge, 2000), 18.

[10] bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (London: Routledge, 2015), 223–38.

[11] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 142.

[12] Ibid., 148.

[13] Gerard Loughlin, "Biblical Bodies," *Theology & Sexuality* 12 (2005): 23. The sex and gender of the early followers of Jesus are also queered, with males being included as Christ's brides in metaphorical sense (Eph. 5:29–32), as much as "Christian" women were included among Jesus's brothers (Rom. 8:28–9). He states: "If only at a symbolic level, all Christian men are queer"; see ibid., 24.

[14] Loughlin, “Biblical Bodies,” 24.

[15] An early example of the way in which gender determines and steers sex is the influence of God’s ascribed male gender on God’s sex: “[T]his becomes all too evident when divinity is used to underwrite certain human orderings, and most notably those that exclude women from certain kinds of power. It is then that we discover that women are not fully human because not really divine—in the way that men are. We discover that gender neutrality is a ruse of male partiality”; see Loughlin, “Biblical Bodies,” 13.

[16] The importance of difference for queer thinking is not primarily about celebrating variety, as difference includes difference in solidarity by acknowledging the different experiences of black, white, disabled, poor, rich, male, female, and transgendered queers. Difference is not viewed as problematic or addressed through the creation of hierarchies or binaries. The latter privileges certain forms of understanding and celebrates this insight as truth rather than as a threat; see Stuart et al., *Religion is a Queer Thing*, 3. Also see Teresa W. Hornsby and Ken Stone, *Bible Trouble: Queer Reading at the Boundaries of Biblical Scholarship*, x–xii, on chaos, the need for it, and the celebration thereof.

[17] Heacock, *Jonathan Loved David*, 149.

[18] A (dual-)sexed God presents a challenge to the traditional notion of a sexless God; see Loughlin, “Biblical Bodies,” 9–27. It is unsurprising to find others arguing that in Genesis 1 and 2 the emphasis is on a “no-body” God, connecting this concept to monotheistic isolation and the absence of a physical body, and similarly raising questions as to whether God should be conceived of in terms of sexuality or sex. Ancient rabbis understood Gen. 1:27–8 to refer to Adam as being created intersexed, not just male or female, but both. This is the image of God in which humankind was created, and God divided Adam into male and female only at a later stage.

[19] Erin Runions, “From Disgust to Humor: Rahab’s Queer Effect,” in *Bible Trouble: Queer Reading at the Boundaries of Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Teresa J. Hornsby and Ken Stone (Semeia Studies 67; Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2011), 45–74.

[20] Stuart Macwilliam, *Queer Theory and the Prophetic Marriage Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible* (London: Routledge, 2014).

[21] Macwilliam’s reading links the sexually extravagant and outrageous transgressing of gender-role expectations with the sexual division of labor; see Macwilliam, *Queer Theory and the Prophetic Marriage Metaphor*.

[22] Marcella Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God* (London / New York, NY: Routledge, 2003), 94.

[23] Althaus-Reid states: “If the Queer theologian meets Rahab the prostitute at the site of her pubis and reads from the perspective of Sodom, she may find subversion and joy in her own clitoris and that may be the beginning of a pubescent biblical theology, a new disorder of imagining Rahab as part of a community of women prostitutes, where she might find many”; see Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, 106.

[24] Gerard Loughlin, “Introduction: The End of Sex,” in *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, ed. Gerard Loughlin (Malden, U.K.: Blackwell, 2007), 8.

[25] Ibid., 9.

[26] Nancy Wilson, *Outing the Bible: Queer Folks, God, Jesus, and the Christian Scriptures* (Indianapolis, IN: Life Journey, 1995), 88–94, 163–7.

[27] Steffan Mathias, “Queering the Body: Un-Desiring Sex in Leviticus,” in *The Body in Biblical, Christian and Jewish Texts*, ed. Joan E. Taylor (Library of Second Temple Studies 85; London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 37.

[28] Queer biblical interpreters have been accused of eliding both race and class. Such reluctance has been interpreted as oppression, since the abstraction of gay identity from race and class concerns perpetuates

white, middle-class dominance. Unfortunately, few scholars of color and differently abled scholars contribute to queer biblical interpretation even today.

[29] Theodor W. Jennings, "YHWH as Erastes," in *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Ken Stone (The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 334; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 36–74.

[30] Stephen D. Moore, *Bible in Theory: Critical and Postcritical Essays* (Resources for Biblical Studies 40; Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2010), 225–45.

[31] Moore, *Bible in Theory*, 245.

[32] Michael Carden, "Remembering Pelotit: A Queer Midrash on Calling Down Fire," in *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Ken Stone (The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 334; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 152–68.

[33] Mona West, "The Gift of Voice, the Gift of Tears: A Queer Reading of Lamentations in the Context of AIDS," in *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Ken Stone (The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 334; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 140–51.

[34] Roland Boer, "Yahweh as Top: A Lost Targum," in *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible*, ed Ken Stone (The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies, vol. 334; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 75–105; Lory Rowlett, "Violent Femmes and S/M: Queering Samson and Delilah," in *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Ken Stone (The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies, vol. 334; Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 106–15.

CHAPTER 6

QUEERING SACRED SEXUAL SCRIPTS FOR TRANSFORMING AFRICAN SOCIETIES

SAROJINI NADAR

THE Civil Union Act of 2006 makes South Africa one of the few countries on the African continent and in the world that offers legal protection and marriage benefits to same-sex partners.[1] Yet the law protects and upholds the civil rights of queer citizens only in limited ways[2] because even the most progressive laws are always inadequate when deeply held religious beliefs, especially when they are based on the sacred texts of those religions, challenge legal validity and authority. The Bible of the Christian tradition is a prime example. The ineptitude of the Civil Union Act becomes evident in the wide range of views expressed by South African politicians and theologians about queer sexuality and same-sex relationships. Their opinions range from queer-phobic to queer-affirming beliefs, and they cross political and theological lines.

Four examples illustrate the positions upheld by South African politicians and theologians. A first example comes from Jacob Zuma, the former president of South Africa, who asserted that so-called cultural beliefs "require" him to "knock out" gay people. He made the following statement during the Heritage Day Celebrations in Kwadukuza in 2006, stating: "Same sex marriage is a disgrace to the nation and to God. When I was growing up, "ungqingili" [homosexualin isiZulu] could not stand in front of me, I would knock him out."[3] Another example comes from Mmusi Maimane, the leader of the opposition

party called the Democratic Alliance, when he addressed a gathering at Liberty Church in Johannesburg, in 2012. He affirmed that he wanted to "save" gay people when he exclaimed:

> I really want to be a friend of sinners. That's part of the mission I believe God has given us: to be a friend of sinners. Because, you know what, I am a sinner. So I guess we can be friends, right? But I don't want to just be their friend 'cause I want them to think, I'm like, they are like a project. I want them to sincerely know I'm their friend. So, you know what I am most grateful of [sic], is that in my friendship circles there are Muslims, there are gay people—because I believe that is what God has called us to do. I take the verse that Jesus says, "I didn't come for the well but I came for the sick." I take that quite seriously.[4]

Yet another position was articulated by Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu who, in 2013, declared that he prefers hell to a homophobic heaven. Speaking at the launch of a gay rights campaign, he stated: "I would not worship a God who is homophobic and that is how deeply I feel about this. I would refuse to go to a homophobic heaven. No, I would say, sorry, I mean I would much rather go to the other place."[5]

A final example comes from Kenneth Meshoe, the leader of the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP), when he stated that Archbishop Tutu neither respects the Scriptures nor believes in the teaching of the Holy Bible. He demanded in 2013: "We ask Archbishop Tutu not to confuse people who respect the scriptures, and advised him to keep his unbelief to himself if he does not believe in the teaching of the Holy Bible."[6] These four positions illustrate the public conundrum about queer identity and sexuality in South Africa.

Unsurprisingly, South African scholars of religion and theology have produced considerable research on the contrasting, contradicting, and charged rhetoric about queer sexuality and identity. This research demonstrates the central role of the Bible, the sacred text of the Christian faith traditions, in condemning non-heteronormative sexual expressions. The research also indicates that fundamentalist Christian groups, inspired by the conservative American religious right, are growing in Africa. Those groups believe that homosexuality is "un-African," although they miss the irony of considering homosexuality as "un-African" when the very adherence to the Bible results from colonialism. South African scholar Thabo Msibi goes even so far as to consider the Bible "un-African" because fundamentalist African Christians quote the Bible in support of their homophobic positions.[7]

Notwithstanding Msibi's dismissal of the Bible as "un-African" and the obvious irony of its use in promoting queer-phobia in Africa, the fact remains that the Bible is a main source text in the litany of condemnations of queer

sexuality and identity. As such, the Bible remains an important "site of struggle"[8] for socially engaged scholars. In other words, those of us who consider ourselves activist-academics engage the Bible to challenge and to promote more life-affirming sexual norms in our effort to support people with diverse sexual and gender identities. This commitment is based on significant research. It suggests that religious and cultural conceptualizations of sex and gender differences limit sexual freedoms for sexual minorities with the goal of protecting the hetero-normative model of the family. Even in transforming contexts, such as South Africa, that have legally progressive constitutions, many people of different faith persuasions argue that the religiously and culturally sanctioned hetero-normative family receives preferential protection by the State, under the guise of constitutional protection of religious and cultural beliefs. Sometimes this constitutional contradiction translates into a "don't touch me on my religious and cultural beliefs" phenomenon, preventing meaningful engagement with religious or cultural beliefs. Socially engaged biblical scholars thus maintain that those belief systems (and their source texts) must be systematically and critically reflected upon. These beliefs about sex and text are often left un-interrogated because they are believed to be "sacred"—hence the reference in the title of this chapter—sacred sex and sacred text.

I use the term sacred in a "Durkheimian"[9] way to describe beliefs about sex and the text, in a way that recognizes these as set apart for or devoted exclusively to one purpose—in the case of sex, its sacredness lies in its sanctification or reservation of the physical genital encounter between opposite sexes,[10] and in the case of the text, its sacredness lies in its authority to be "God's word" which sets norms and rules for how people ought to live their lives—and defines what is sacred and "right sex" as indicated below.

On February 26, 2014, Ludovica Iaccino reports the following in the *International Business Times*:

> Uganda's Right Reverend Father Simon Lokodo has claimed that heterosexual rape is preferable to homosexual intercourse and said child rape is "natural." Lokodo, who is the current State Minister for Ethics and Integrity in Uganda and claims to have several degrees in theology, considers himself a good Christian who defends his country from the threat of homosexuality. He expressed his controversial views during an interview with English comedian, actor, writer, presenter and activist, Stephen Fry, who is himself gay. When asked whether homosexuality was worse than heterosexual child rape, Lokodo responded: "Let them do it … as long as it is in the right way."[11]

The interview and Fry's account of what the minister said caused an uproar among human rights activists. In Fry's words:

I said “That was on camera. Do you know that was on camera?”
He said “Yes.”
I said “Can you just explain what you meant?”
“Well, it is men raping girls. Which is natural.”

On the online comments thread to the article a reader asks: “Where does this minister get these absurd ideas from?” This is an excellent question. A well-known scholar and theorist on sexualities in Africa, Sylvia Tamale, explains the origins of these kinds of ideas when she writes:

> [T]he current homophobic upsurge and the legal winds of recriminalization of same-sex relations that are sweeping across the African continent, from Dakar to Djibouti and from Cairo to Cape Town, are not coincidental, nor are they mere happenstance. Recent history has connected the religious and politically-inspired homophobia in African states to renewal evangelical movements (aligned with the neoconservative right) in the United States.[12]

In short, the combination of homophobic convictions within fundamentalist Christian movements across the continents of Africa and America reinforces homophobic policies and views in many African countries, including in South Africa. These convictions are inspired by interpretations of sacred texts which govern norms for sexuality.

This essay examines how various sexual scripts constitute lay and scholarly readings of Judges 19. Scripts that align with heteronormative sexuality not only promote discrimination but they also encourage violence against queer bodies, an outcome which is expected from readings within such a framework. However, even scripts that are queer affirming rely on violence against the original queer sex—woman—as they, too, assert the notion that biblical texts are not about queer and specifically homosexual relations. Rather, these scripts are produced within a framework of masculinity that defines masculinity as vile, violent, or inviolable. The essay examines these issues in three main sections. It explains sexual-scripting theory and its usefulness for the examination of this particular topic. It then explores the three scripts of masculinities, namely vile masculinities, violent masculinities, and inviolable masculinities, as they appear in lay and scholarly readings of Judges 19. It also proposes an alternative feminist script that re-inscribes the body of the original queer sex—woman—to more authentically queer the biblical text.

Explaining Sexual Scripting and Its

Usefulness for Biblical Interpretation

I use sexual scripting as an approach for understanding how lay and scholarly interpretations of Judges 19 draw on the scripts, as they exist within and outside of the biblical text, to construct meanings about gender identity and sexuality. The theory about sexual scripting originates with John Gagnon and William Simon who developed it in 1973.[13] They explain that sexual scripting is "a conceptual apparatus with which to examine development and experience of the sexual." Yet nowadays the approach is understood more broadly as "cognitive schema that instruct people how to understand and act in sexual situations. They [these scripts] operate on cultural, interpersonal, and intrapersonal levels."[14] The value of this broader understanding of sexual scripting is that it highlights how lay and scholarly interpretations of biblical texts adhere to scripts that view "sacred sex" through mutually constructed operations of power at the cultural, interpersonal, and intrapersonal levels.

The idea of sexual scripting is therefore a helpful analytical tool for understanding how biblical interpretations produce and sustain heteronormative and heterosexist beliefs that prescribe the limits of sacred sex. As Sylvia Tamale states:

> Historically, all over Africa, the "truth regimes" about sexuality are largely penned by the nib of legislation, custom and religion. The "master frames" (or scripts) of sexuality that law, culture and religion construct for African people push many who do not conform, to the very margins of society–sex workers, rape survivors, the youth, homosexuals, widows, single mothers, people living with HIV, and so forth. Their bodies become sites for political inscription even as they are constituted as the sexual "other."[15]

In this sense, sexual scripts are "truth regimes" about sexuality constructed at the cultural, interpersonal, and intrapersonal levels.

The following sections on the various scripts on masculinity explain how lay and scholarly interpretations of Judges 19 produce such truth regimes. It will become clear that they do not only result from flawed textual analysis but they also rely on limited sexual analysis. The latter assumes fixed and stable definitions of gender, especially in regard to masculinity and femininity. As a result, lay and scholarly biblical interpreters have little problem in textually violating the body of the woman to achieve their theo-political ends. They tolerate proposed or enacted sexual violence against the female characters in Judges 19 to uphold male supremacy, whether it is defined as heteronormative or queer.

Scripts of Vile Masculinities

The first of three pervasive and highly oppressive scripts on masculinity collude with the patriarchal sexual script. They justify sexual violence against women as the lesser of two evils. Its goal is to eliminate sexual acts with men, especially sexual violence against men, from the imaginary because they regard such acts as "vile masculinities." An example is a sermon by Pastor Roger Jimenez of Verity Baptist Church in Sacramento, California, which he preached on the Sunday after the Saturday night killings in the Pulse gay nightclub in the United States. The sermon clearly illustrates the script of vile masculinities. Pastor Jimenez's theological explanations make the connection between homophobic practices and fundamentalist Christian convictions. Sylvia Tamale observes correctly that this kind of right-wing rhetoric fuels homophobic sentiments that African political leaders, such as the Ugandan minister of ethics and integrity, also make in their respective settings. It is thus worthwhile to look at the American pastor who offers a "biblical response" to the Orlando shootings, stating:

> I would like to teach you the biblical response to events like what happened last night. … As Christians we should not be mourning the death of 50 Sodomites …. Why? Because the bible teaches that every single one of the sodomites is a predator. … People say, "Well, aren't you sad that 50 sodomites died?" Here's the problem with that, it's like the equivalent of asking me, "Well, aren't you sad that 50 paedophiles were killed today?" Um no. I think that's great. I think that helps society. I think Orlando, Florida, is a little safer tonight. The tragedy is that more of them didn't die. The tragedy is I'm kind of upset he didn't finish the job—because these people are predators. They are abusers … if God puts the death penalty on it God says they deserve to die, and when they die this is not something as Christians we need to be mourning.[16]

Shockingly, Pastor Jimenez wishes for additional murders in the name of God. Then he reflects on Judges 19, making several references to Genesis 19. He explains that "the bible paints a picture that these ['the Sodomites'] are wicked people." He rationalizes the murderous shooting in a Florida gay club with a script on vile masculinity when he characterizes the murdered men as "predators," "abusers," and "pedophiles." In his view, they deserved to die as God's punishment for their sexual sins.

The story of Judges 19 is aptly known as a "text of terror."[17] It is gruesome. A man offers his young daughter and his guest's concubine to be raped instead of his male guest. Reminiscent of Genesis 19, the story about Sodom and Gomorrah, the tale in Judges 19 differs in one crucial point. Whereas Lot's

daughters are not raped, the concubine of Judges 19 is gang-raped to her death. The story ends with the proposition: "Consider it, take counsel and speak out." Pastor Jimenez considers the story extensively and then takes counsel by "speaking out" against modern-day Sodomites. This Christian minister endorses the notion that the shot and murdered men deserved to die. It is interesting that this Christian fundamentalist preacher produces a sexual script about profane sex not on the basis of the rape of the concubine but on the basis of the perceived sex between men. His only excuse, offered in a fleeting sentence about the man and Lot offering up their daughters and concubine, is that "those who live in a society where there is perverseness about them … they begin to think in perverted ways." Then the preacher quickly moves onto the "vileness" of the proposed rape of the men. He explains that, in his belief, God chooses "throughout the bible" to describe the act of sex between men as "vile."

Pastor Jimenez's interpretation of Judges 19 is limited to the perceived "abomination" of potential sex between men. The counsel he takes from the biblical tale is that "Sodomites" deserve to die. Similar to the minister of ethics and integrity from Uganda, Pastor Jimenez propagates the idea that heterosexual rape is preferable to any other form of same-sex consensual sex. This kind of sermon as well as many other publications about biblical teachings use Judges 19 to articulate God's disapproval of homosexuality. They affirm this biblical story as sacred to define heteronormative sex as "normal" and "un-perverted." It is sacred and thus set apart for encounters only between women and men. This is the "right way" of having sex, and so interpreters praise the old man in Judges 19 when he explains offering his daughters: "No, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Since this man is my guest, do not do this vile thing. Here are my virgin daughter and his concubine; let me bring them out now. Ravish them and do whatever you want to them; but against this man do not do such a vile thing" (Judg. 19:23–24). Many interpreters make the same interpretive move for Lot in Genesis 19 as he offers his two daughters to the mob (Gen. 19:7–8). In other words, when interpreters define "sacred sex" as heteronormative sex, the "vile thing" is not the daughters' rape, proposed by their father, but the possibility of sexual intercourse between the men. It is the "vile thing," in their mind.

Scripts of Violent Masculinities

The second sexual script on "scripts of violent masculinities" frowns upon rape, but it keeps essentialized ideas about rape intact. In other words, rape is here

seen as an overtly masculine act, and it is part of a culture of violent masculinities. While rape must be understood within the context of violent masculinities, this violence is not just physical or sexual but also textual. It is part of the wider discursive practices that constitute "rape culture."[18] Feminist exegete J. Cheryl Exum explains this dynamic when she talks about the hierarchy of violations in Judges 19. She calls the female character Batshever (the daughter of breaking) who, according to Exum, is also "raped by the pen." Accordingly, the textual rape relates to the dominance of the male gaze. Exum explains this connection stating:

> Raped by the pen is not the same as raped by the penis … . [Consider] two different kinds of textual rape: rape that is recounted in a narrative and rape that takes place by means of a narrative … . My primary interest in the comparison is to see how women are portrayed in texts where they are the objects of sexual aggression and to inquire how women's bodies are focalised in these texts; that is to investigate women as the object of the male gaze.[19]

Exum focuses on the rape by focusing the women as the biblical text depicts them. She notices that women are the objects of its male gaze.

Unsurprisingly, other biblical scholars dispute Exum's sympathetic analysis of the female character. They do not understand that rape culture is perpetuated in their discursive practice. For instance, South African Bible scholar, Douglas Lawrie, disagrees with Exum when he maintains: "Female characters are manipulated—not raped—by the pen, because they are 'promising material' for an author who wishes to evoke shock and disgust. Often, we forgive or overlook such manipulation because all authors, do, to some extent, 'exploit' their characters."[20] Similarly, Jimenez finds in the Levite's concubine "promising material" to evoke shock and disgust not only about what happens to *her* body but also about the possibility of male-on-male sex. The focal point of Jimenez's male gaze is sex between two men.

My reading offers yet a third way to engage Exum's important point about the sexual script of violent masculinity in Judges 19. In entrenching the focal gaze on the men and their violence, I suggest that the un-named concubine is not just raped by the pen but also raped in the pulpit, as so many preachers omit focusing on *her* broken body. She becomes dispensable and peripheral to the preaching plot, as the threatened male-on-male rape dominates the ecclesial imagination. Thus, the sexual script of many sermons turns the female character, Batshever, into the supporting actress for the ecclesial production of sacred sexuality. She is "out-scripted" and only "in-scripted" in so far as she demonstrates the enormity of the possible crime, homosexual rape, against the

male Levite.

Unfortunately, queer theorists do not offer a much kinder sexual script for the female character of Judges 19. They emphasize that the men are threatened to be "feminized" by sexual penetration. For instance, Ken Stone states:

> While discussions of this scene have long been tied up with evaluations of same-sex sexual contact among later readers, it is important to note that the kind of phallic aggression represented here has little to do with modern conceptions of homosexuality. In the socio-cultural context of the ancient Mediterranean and near Eastern world, sexual penetration symbolizes unequal power relations. Thus the public rape of one male by another constitutes a powerful semiotic mechanism humiliating the raped man in the eyes of the other men by making of him a sexual object.[21]

While Stone defends the "masculine prerogative to sexual subjectivity"[22] and the threat of "phallic aggression" with a historical argument as a means for queering his interpretation of Judges 19, he affirms the sexual script in which the male appears as the "real victim of masculinity."

Some feminist thinkers give considerable thought to the problematic stances taken in traditional androcentric and queer-affirming interpretations of Judges 19. They locate the problem within critical masculinity studies. For instance, Melanie McCarry, a feminist theorist, explains that critical masculinity studies offer only limited understanding of male violence. In her view, one of the drawbacks of the upsurge of masculinity studies is "that men are constructed as the real victims of masculinity."[23] By portraying the Levite and Lot's guests as "the real victims of masculinity" in queer discourse, many androcentric and queer-affirming readers sacrifice the female characters. In fact, they collude with the patriarchal sexual script, failing to recognize that even queer men benefit from the patriarchal dividend and that violated masculinity does not equal violated femininity.

Scripts of Inviolable Masculinity

The third sexual script offers yet another pernicious heteronormative and androcentric view on masculinity. It maintains that men cannot be raped, and so interpreters must do everything to disallow this possibility. Many interpretations of Judges 19 follow this script. They readily sacrifice the female body to ensure that the masculinity of the Levite man is not violated. As a result, many readers offer little hermeneutical resistance to the concubine's rape and murder. Instead they explain away the horror she endures. For instance, some readers view the

vileness as a lack of "hospitality,"[24] and so they excuse the fathers of Judges 19 and Genesis 19—the old man or Lot—for offering the concubine and daughters. Some interpreters debate in great detail the legality of the hospitality code and so obscure the potential rape of Lot's daughters through extensive discussion. For instance, Victor H. Matthews maintains:

> The only problem with this seemingly perfect example of the code is that Lot has no right to offer these strangers hospitality. It would be different if Lot was in his own encampment, in front of his own tent (as Abraham is in Gen 18:1; Van Nieuwenhuijze: 701). However, he is sitting in the gate of Sodom and he is not a citizen of that city. He is a resident alien (*ger*), and therefore cannot represent the city in this matter. The legal principle regarding the transient stranger is one of reciprocity between individuals and groups. When a town is involved, however, it is the obligation of a citizen of that town to offer these individuals hospitality (Van Nieuwenhuijze: 287). But this obligation has been usurped here by Lot.[25]

Matthews maintains that Lot does not have full legal authority to offer hospitality because he is only a resident alien and not a full citizen of Sodom. He excuses the male character of Genesis 19.

This position is also assumed in some queer readings. For instance, a South African organization called "Inclusive and Affirming Ministries (IAM)" that promotes queer-affirming interpretations of the Bible refers to Genesis 19. It states the importance of hospitality in ancient Israel as an explanation for the father's proposal when it explains:

> In the time of Lot there were strict rules that applied to hospitality. It was very important to treat visitors to your house in such a way that they did not become enemies. These hospitality rules required that you had to protect your visitors at all cost, even if it were at your own expense. Taking this into consideration Lot took an honourable and responsible action in protecting his visitors, when he offered his daughters to the men of Sodom for sex, see also Judges 19.[26]

While this queer resource also emphasizes that the biblical narratives do not depict God as rejecting homosexuality but as rejecting homosexual *rape*, this position nevertheless is willing to sacrifice the bodies of the female characters, namely the two daughters and the concubine. Thus, the queer-affirming group still advances a rather sexist position. They tolerate that the women are offered to the men of Sodom for sex, which they do not define as rape, and they find this offer honorable in the context of the hospitality customs prevalent at the time.

Yet all of these hermeneutical efforts are useless when one follows the historical argumentation. When we understand the rape and murder of the woman within the ancient context, the crime is not committed against the individual woman but against her male master, the Levite. This historical situation indicates that the Levite's masculinity is violated when his concubine is

raped and murdered. She is his representative and what happens to her happens to him. Some interpreters, in fact, make this argument. For instance, Ken Stone explains the depicted activities of the Levite man in Judges 20 when he states:

> We may well wonder whether the outrage expressed by the Levite in Judges 20 is grounded in care and compassion for his murdered concubine or whether, in fact, he is not responding angrily to a situation in which he feels dishonoured by the brutal treatment of his property. It is important to note how the Levite describes the situation to his fellow Israelites: the inhabitants of Gibeah rose up against *me*, and surrounded *me*, in the house at night intending to kill *me*, and they abused *my* concubine and she died.[27]

Stone makes an important observation about the Levite's explanations in Judg. 20:4–7. The male Levite emphasizes that *he* is the violated character in the events and *not* his woman. He exclaims that everything happened to "me, me, me!" In other words, in the historical context of the story the male character is at the center of the crime committed to his woman.

In sum, it is safe to observe that not only homophobic or queer interpretations reinforce the male gaze, but the text itself depicts the sexual violence against the female character as a crime perpetrated against the man. He is the sexually violated character. Perhaps for this reason Judges 19 and Genesis 19 have disturbed the homophobic and androcentric imaginary for so long. The Bible itself promotes the sexual script on the inviolability of the masculine. Overall then, the scripts of vile masculinities, violent masculinities, and inviolable masculinities that homophobic and queer readers reinforce in their interpretations of Judge 19 indicate that threatened or executed sexual violence always portrays men as the ultimate victims of masculinity. Thus, these scripts collude with unjust gender power relations and they do not adequately critique them. Moreover, the sexual scripts of masculinities do not only endorse homophobia but they also promote sexual violence against women. They tolerate and even accept the dis-membered body of the concubine in Judges 19. Clearly, we must find viable, just, and feminist alternative sexual scripts. Yet the challenge is how to re-member Batshever's body, how to give voice to her perspective, and how to imagine what she would say to those who do not conform to heteropatriarchy and heterosexist ways of being in the world. The following section presents such an alternative script that speaks from the re-membered Batshever in the genre of an imaginary interview.

RE-SCRIPTING BY RE-INSCRIBING THE "QUEER SEX"

SN:Batshever, what an ordeal you have been through! I feel privileged as a twenty-first-century woman who identifies as a South African feminist scholar to speak with you. I believe your ordeal has probably taught you so much. I can only imagine the pain and the anger that you must feel. Would you please share some of your reflections with us?

BATSHEVER:You are damn right I am angry! I am angry at so many things, but let's begin with the sermon that you mentioned earlier, given by that guy from the U.S.A. and all his cronies. How dare he and all his ilk establish what they think are God's rules about men having sex with men, through my dis-membered body!

SN:Yes, Batshever, I am sorry you were raped by the pen, as Cheryl Exum pointed out. Indeed, you continue to be raped at the pulpit each time the focus is turned to men who essentially step over your violated body.

BATSHEVER:Yes, men keep writing these scripts, don't they? We need new scripts, you know!

SN:Yes, indeed, we do, but what might those new scripts look like?

BATSHEVER:Well, we need transgressive feminist sexuality scripts.

SN:Excuse me, what?

BATSHEVER:Yeah, yeah, I know. You are shocked that I know the "f" word! Listen, just because we didn't use the word feminist back then, doesn't mean we didn't practice it! I was shocked to discover that the King James Version of the Bible, used by Pastor Jimenez, states: "And his concubine played the whore against him, and went away from him unto her father's house to Bethlehem, Judah, and was there four whole months." "Played the whore?" Isn't that exactly how all women who act autonomously are judged?

SN:Yes, indeed. Gale Yee, a contemporary feminist biblical scholar, picked up on this point a few years ago when she mentioned your feminist act of transgressive action: "It is her very abandonment of her husband that the Deuteronomist describes as "fornicating" against her husband …. [D]isrupting the household by vacating it abruptly is one of a number of strategies women adopt to exercise autonomy in androcentric societies. In a society that so rigorously supervises the sexuality of its women, the daring act of leaving a husband would be judged, as the Deuteronomist does in this case, as a metaphoric act of "fornication."[28] So what you were doing was being transgressive?

BATSHEVER: Yes! My act of leaving was considered an act of adultery. And please note, if I did not "play the whore" I would have not been allowed to return to my father's house. Instead, I would have been stoned to death and my husband, my master, the very religious Levite from the priestly class, would not have come to speak tenderly to me and to woo me back. My act of leaving was certainly frowned upon, but not unexpected, as I did not quite fit the norm of the submissive wife! My Levite husband was often ashamed when he was asked: "who is the man in this relationship?"

SN: Yes! Women who choose to be in same-sex partnerships today are asked the same question aren't they? One of my masters-level students refers in her thesis, entitled "Who's in Charge in a Genderless Marriage," to an incident that illustrates this point well. During a debate over same-sex marriage between the late Steve de Gruchy, a South African liberation theologian, a young man asked who is in charge in light of the Apostle Paul's position in 1 Corinthians 11 in which Paul declares Christ to be the head of the Church as every husband is the head of his wife. In his question the young man assumed that power resides in the male gender of the husband. However, he ignored the possibility of marriage between two husbands or two wives. Who is in charge then? Mpho Tutu van Furth who married her partner in May 2016 released a press statement on her decision to surrender her license in which she responded to the question of who the man is in her relationship with another woman. She explained that the culturally accepted power differential is embedded in the question. A questioner assumes that the normative is heterosexuality. Several other questions are subsumed in this assumption. Among them are: Who stays at home? Who is responsible for cooking and cleaning? Who has primary responsibility for child-rearing and elder care? Who is the primary breadwinner? Who is the head of the household? In the South African context two additional questions may be added: Who can have multiple sexual partners (in or out of wedlock) and who gets to be drunk and violently abusive to his partner with little fear of religious sanction and no cultural consequence? Tutu Van Furth also explained:

> My wife is a pediatrician and a professor of pediatric infectious diseases at the Vrije University Medical Center in Amsterdam. I am the Executive Director of the Desmond & Leah Tutu Legacy Foundation in Cape Town. We have decided that we both will be the women in the relationship. We meet as mutually respectful equals who enjoy working and who enjoy working together. Neither of us stays home. Both of us enjoy cooking, we

share responsibility for cleaning and employ domestic workers.[29]

BATSHEVER: Wow! So Mpho Tutu van Furth's marriage invites us to consider radical gender equality scripts. To have two "women" in the relationship, that means nobody is in charge!

SN: Yes, but only if you are willing to move out of the essentialized script of who a woman is. Don't be fooled, Batshever, even same-sex relationships can be very violent if the partners subscribe to traditional gender roles, in which one sees themselves as male and the other as female. The irony is that both the systems of patriarchy and equality require a gender binary to sustain its arguments. Either there is a hierarchy between the sexes or there is equality between the sexes. Mpho Tutu's reflections brings this binary up for scrutiny. "We have decided that we will both be the women in the relationship." This calls into question the stable category of "woman." It invites us, as Judith Butler[30] and others explain, to consider the instability not only of the binary but also of the very categories of "woman."

BATSHEVER: Yes, I can see the problem of essentialized ideas about gender. What we need are non-binary embodied and intersectional scripts. Since I came to your context, I have been fascinated by the story of Caster Semenya. By the way I was thrilled by her win in Rio on August 21, 2016. I felt so proud I could have easily been mistaken for being South African! I am fascinated by the public's obsession with Caster's body. As someone who has had the most horrendous forms of violence done to my own body, I identify with the pain she must have experienced at having her body being used to define and regulate what a woman's body should look like and how a woman's body should perform. When that body is a black body, the analysis is rendered even more complex. My own body was violated in the way it was because of the understanding that a male body should not and cannot be penetrated, as if our body parts define our identities and as if our body parts can only be sanctified for singular uses. Someone once said mouths are meant for eating and not oral sex! The understanding that we are either male or female with no consideration that gender falls on a spectrum is where the problem lies. Recently, I watched a BBC documentary interview with Caster. She comments there:

> The way you were born is the way you were born … . Nothing can change it. I've got a deep voice. I know. I might look tough but what are you going to do? Do you think you can change it? No. If someone was born the way

she was born, are you going to blame him or are you going to blame God? Whose fault is that? Nobody's.

SN: Exactly! And I am sure she uses mixed pronouns deliberately. They are not accidental.

BATSHEVER: Yes, indeed, Caster's controversial body, my erased body, and the raped and violated bodies of the women in South Africa, such as Eudy Simelane, remind us that the (female) body is not a means to an end but an end in itself. It also tells us that the (female) body is not a "necessary evil" but a gift from God. And as a theologian I want to add that the "wounded and violated bodies" of women like myself, can be read in juxtaposition with the "wounded and violated body" of Christ. The wounds of Christ, like my own body, are "glossed over" in traditional christologies because the wounds rather than real bodies are linked to the salvation for sins. As Megan Mckenna explains: "To say that Jesus died for our sins is only half a theology, it is to forget that he was executed because he was dangerous to a society that wanted to hold onto its power."

SN: And power is at the heart of this debate! Thank you Batshever. I am so glad we brought your voice into our script today although your body has been erased from it.

Re-writing the Script: About the Future Task of Feminist Biblical Interpreters

The re-imagination or even the re-writing of sexual scripts is a complex task. Apart from the fact that religious and cultural norms and texts render sexuality "sacred," the complexity also derives from power differentials that accompany gender identity and sexual orientation. Hence, the theoretical task of "queering" homophobic interpretations cannot be left to the discipline of queer studies or masculinity studies alone. Three scripts of vile, violent, and inviolable masculinities show that these scripts unwittingly align themselves with popular homophobic biblical readings. They identify with the male characters and protect them from violence by tolerating the violation of women instead of the men. They also consider violence against women as the lesser evil of male gay sex or rape. Most importantly, they erase women's violated bodies from the scripts they construct. This essay illustrated the three scripts on masculinity with

lay and scholarly interpretations of Judges 19, showing that theoretical choices have practical consequences, resulting in rape culture. The imagined conversation between the sexually violated and murdered woman in Judges 19 whom Exum names Bathshever offers us alternative scripts. Unquestionably, feminist biblical interpreters must compose many other stories and interviews about women in the Bible that do not advance sexual scripts harmful to women and men. We must compose viable, just, and feminist alternative sexual scripts to offer inclusive ways of reading, writing, and imagining biblical stories for a world without sexual violence.

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[1] This essay is based on my inaugural lecture for the position of the Desmond Tutu Research Chair in Religion and Social Justice, delivered at the University of the Western Cape on August 25, 2016.

[2] I use the term "queer" as an overarching term to describe people who self-identify as non-gender conforming or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or intersex (LGBTI) or who in general refuse to conform to sexual and gender normativities (LGBTQI+). There is a long history of subverting the original derogatory use of the term both in activism and academia.

[3] Available at https://www.news24.com/Archives/City-Press/From-clever-blacks-to-Jesus-Jacob-Zuma-in-quotes-20150429 [accessed February 4, 2019].

[4] Available at https://www.mambaonline.com/2015/05/05/das-maimane-kinda-supports-gay-marriage-despite-anti-gay-church/ [accessed February 4, 2019].

[5] Available at https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-23464694 [accessed February 4, 2019].

[6] Available at https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/2013-07-31-meshoe-slams-tutu-about-gays-

comment/ [accessed on February 4, 2019].

[7] Thabo Msibi, "The Lies We Have Been Told: On (Homo) Sexuality in Africa," *Africa Today* 58 (2011): 55–77.

[8] For an explanation of the phrase "site of struggle," see Gerald West, "Redaction Criticism as a Resource," *Old Testament Essays* 30.2 (2017): 525–45.

[9] David Chidester explains this Durkeimian sense of the term "sacred," stating in *Wild Religion: Tracking the Sacred in South Africa* (Berkeley / Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2012), 5: "In the study of religion, the sacred has been defined as both supremely transcendental and essentially social, as an otherness transcending the ordinary world … following Émile Durkheim's understanding of the sacred as that which is set apart from the ordinary daily rhythms of life, but set apart in such a way that it stands at the centre of community formation. In between the radical transcendence of the sacred and the social dynamics of the sacred, we find ongoing mediations, at the intersections of personal subjectivity and social collectivities, in which anything can be sacralized through the religious work of intensive interpretation, regular ritualization, and inevitable contestation over ownership of the means, modes and forces for producing the sacred."

[10] I agree with the body of literature that redefines sex as "holy" rather than "profane." However, I use the term to denote exclusiveness to the heterosexual encounter rather than in the wider sense of sex as a spiritual experience.

[11] Ludovica Iaccino, "Ugandan Reverend Simon Lokodo: 'Child Rape Better than Homosexuality,'" *International Business Times* (February 26, 2014); available at http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/ugandan-reverend-simon-lokodo-child-rape-better-homosexuality-video-1437976 [accessed January 31, 2019].

[12] Sylvia Tamale, "Exploring the Contours of African Sexualities: Religion, Law and Power," *African Human Rights Law Journal* 14.1 (2014): 166. Speaking specifically of Uganda, Thabo Msibi notes: "Evangelical organizations, which are thriving throughout Uganda, have been instrumental, not only in initiating homophobic sentiments, but also in spreading them"; see Msibi, *The Lies We Have Been Told*, 59.

[13] John Gagnon and William Simon, *Sexual Conduct: The Social Sources of Human Sexuality* (Chicago, IL: Aldine, 1973).

[14] Tatiana N. Masters, Erin Casey, Elizabeth A. Wells, and Diane M. Morrison, "Sexual Scripts among Young Heterosexually Active Men and Women: Continuity and Change," *Journal of Sex Research* 50.5 (2013): 409–20.

[15] Tamale, "Exploring the Contours of African Sexualities," 158.

[16] See https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2016/06/14/pastor-refuses-to-mourn-orlando-victims-the-tragedy-is-that-more-of-them-didnt-die/ [accessed January 31, 2019].

[17] Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Overtures to Biblical Theology; Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1984).

[18] D. Herman, "The Rape Culture," *Culture* 1.10 (1988): 45–53; Emilie Buchwald, Pamela R. Fletcher, and Martha Roth, eds., *Transforming Rape Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 1993).

[19] Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 135–62.

[20] Douglas Lawrie. "Outrageous Terror and Trying Texts: Restoring Human Dignity in Judges 19–21," in Juliana L. Claassens and Bruce C. Birch, eds., *Restorative Readings: The Old Testament, Ethics, and Human Dignity* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 44.

[21] Ken Stone, *Practicing Safer Texts: Food, Sex and Bible in Queer Perspective* (New York, NY: T&T Clark International, 2005), 79–80.

[22] Caroline Blyth, *The Narratives of Rape in Genesis 34: Interpreting Dinah's Silence* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 73.

[23] Melanie McCarry, "Masculinity Studies and Male Violence: Critique or Collusion?," *Women's Studies International Forum* 30.5 (2007): 404–15. McCarry also criticizes masculinity studies when she explains "that masculinity becomes disembodied from men and as such masculinity becomes problematized instead of the practices of men; and that despite the alleged alignment with feminism the male masculinity theorists are often not reflexive about their work in terms of both political and personal commitments."

[24] Victor H. Matthews, "Hospitality and Hostility in Genesis 19 and Judges 19," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 22.1 (1992): 3–11; David Penchansky, "Staying the Night: Intertextuality in Genesis and Judges," in *Reading between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Danna Nolan Fewell (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 77–88.

[25] Matthews, "Hospitality and Hostility," 4.

[26] "Journey with God: Focusing on Sexuality and Spirituality"; available at http://iam.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/IAM-Biblestudy-Journey-with-God.pdf [accessed August 1, 2016].

[27] Stone, *Practicing Safer Texts*, 81.

[28] Gale A. Yee, "Ideological Criticism: Judges 17–21 and the Dismembered Body," in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Gale A. Yee (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992), 153.

[29] Biénne Huisman, "Tutu Forced to Quit over Gay Marriage"; available at https://city-press.news24.com/News/tutu-forced-to-quit-over-gay-marriage-20160521 [accessed May 22, 2016].

[30] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York, NY: Routledge Classics, 2011).

CHAPTER 7

THE DEMAND TO LISTEN TO KOREAN "COMFORT WOMEN" AND TO TWO BIBLICAL WOMEN

YANI YOO

ONLY a few hundred Korean "comfort women" survived the brutal sexual enslavement by the Japanese Imperial Army before and during the Second World War. An estimated 200,000 girls, who were as young as 11 years, and young women were forced into sexual slavery. Although most of them were Korean, some of the women and girls were Chinese, Filipino, Indonesian, Burmese, Vietnamese, Thai, Malaysian, Taiwanese, and even Dutch. About two-thirds of the victims died before the end of the war. Survivors started coming out only in 1991, and even today they have not yet been properly heard. They have yet to receive justice. This essay reads 1 Kgs. 3:16–28 from the perspective of comfort women and all the other women who live under sexually abusive and violent oppression.

Public conversation on the fate of comfort women during the Second World War have begun in South Korea only recently. It required former comfort women to speak out decades later, remembering the tremendous pain, death, and suffering they experienced and witnessed. About twenty years ago, one of them, Yil Chool Kang, drew a painting entitled "Girls Being Burnt."[1] The painting depicts a scene of her ordeal after she had become sick with Typhoid fever at the "comfort station." She and ten sick girls were ordered to get onto a truck. The soldiers told them they would receive medical treatment, but the truck stopped

somewhere in the mountains. Kang saw armed soldiers around a fire pit. When she came closer, she saw a dozen women burnt in a fire pit. She understood that she and the other sick girls were brought here only to be burnt in the fire pit. Japanese military dealt with girls in this way when they were not "useful" anymore. Some women in the pit were still alive. Several girls from Kang's group were shot and thrown into the pit. Miraculously, a battle began and one soldier saved Kang's life. More than fifty and even sixty years after the horrendous experiences of rape, sexual violence, and death did the surviving comfort women speak. Why did Korean politicians and leaders not listen to them earlier or take their experiences of pain and suffering into account when they made reconciliatory agreements with Japan after the war?

This essay presents a literary reading of a famous biblical story to demonstrate how its meaning shifts when the women become the center of the exegetical attention. It examines various literary features and characteristics in the biblical text to make this point and to demonstrate that the women are the central literary characters. Androcentric interpreters usually ignore the women. They focus on the king, praising him for his wisdom in judging a difficult court case.[2] Yet this essay maintains that the king turns out to be a fool because he does not listen to the common people, such as the two women who bring their complaint to the royal court. It turns out that the king is not a wise ruler at all. Rather, he controls his people with threats of violence and destruction. He is also vain, singing his own praises. However, a feminist hermeneutics informed by the comfort women teaches readers to listen to the women's stories. The changed hermeneutical perspective yields a very different meaning of 1 Kgs. 3:16–28. It teaches readers to resist those in power and to question their authority, especially when they make decisions without listening to the people in general and marginalized women in particular.

The following interpretation, examining various literary features of 1 Kgs. 3:16–28 from the perspective of oppressed women, is grounded in the Korean comfort women's perspectives that value women. The following literary-contextualized reading argues that the biblical narrative's literary features, especially its textual, grammatical, and literary ambiguities, allow us to develop a subversive interpretation. The ambiguities indicate that the biblical tale is wide open to a subversive feminist reading in which the women are central and the king is not as wise as assumed. Ambiguity is a frequent literary device that confuses and frees readers. It inspires them to new insights.[3] There are many ambiguities in the biblical story. The king is anonymous and, in fact, not named Solomon. The demonstrative pronouns are confusing. No crime and no

punishment are mentioned. The appearance of the sword is strange. Most importantly, the mother of the living child is not identified and the king does not bother to identify her. All of these ambiguities make androcentric readings unconvincing that praise the king for his wise decision. What wise king? Does he not rule against the women when he does not even listen to their concerns?

Several sections organize the analysis. The first section contextualizes the hermeneutical perspective of the so-called comfort women in South Korea to highlight the need to listen to oppressed women everywhere, including women's voices in the selected biblical narrative. The second section outlines why it is crucial to emphasize the centrality of the two women in 1 Kgs. 3:16–28. The third section argues for the importance of the biblical women's close relationship. The fourth section explains why the ambiguous uses of pronouns contributes to a confused understanding of the royal verdict. The fifth section scrutinizes the unclear aspects of the trial process depicted in the biblical tale. The sixth section questions the origins of the royal lack of wisdom. The conclusion connects the main findings with the situation of the Korean comfort women. Overall, then, this feminist study of 1 Kgs. 3:16–28 reminds readers that both the biblical story and the devastating experiences of the former sex slaves of the Japanese military during the Second World War illustrate the ongoing need to listen to oppressed and marginalized women whose fate is decided in unjust ways by unjust, uncaring, and self-serving rulers even today.

Listening to Korean Comfort Women

Comfort women started telling their stories only in 1991. One of stories comes from the former comfort woman, Ok-Seon Lee, a 90-year-old survivor.[4] When she was 14 years old, a group of men abducted her on the streets in southeastern Busan City. They threw her into a car and took her to a so-called "comfort station" for the Japanese military in China. There she was raped daily for three years until the end of the war. She describes her experience in this way: "It was not a place for human beings. It was a slaughterhouse. We were often beaten, threatened and attacked with knives. We were 11, 12, 13 or 14 years old and we didn't believe anyone would save us from that hell." In a state of constant despair many girls committed suicide by drowning or hanging themselves. Lee also thought that suicide was her only option, but she decided to live on. After the Japanese surrender in August of 1945, the women were free again. They were confused and disoriented. Lee remembers: "I didn't know where I should

go. I had no money. I was homeless and had to sleep on the streets."

She did not know how to get back to Korea. The shame she felt was so overwhelming that she kept the secret to herself for nearly sixty years. Lee married a man of Korean descent and took care of his children. "I felt it was my duty to take care of these children, whose mother had died. I wasn't able to have any children of my own." Because she had contracted a sexually transmitted disease in the "comfort station," she became so sick that she nearly died. To increase her chances of survival, doctors removed her uterus. In 2000, after the death of her husband, she felt the urge to go back to her home country and to make her story public. Since then she has lived in the "House of Sharing," which provides assisted living for former sex slaves.

Lee's story contains many typical elements of what other sex slaves had gone through. They were kidnapped or deceitfully taken away from their families. Afterwards they endured constant rape and other forms of torture and violence. Feeling ashamed, they suffered from sickness and poverty. They kept their secrets for decades. In fact, Japan's war crimes and the women's suffering were silenced until the early 1990s. The disclosure began with Haksoon Kim's testimony in 1991, and eventually 238 women came forward and registered their complaint officially. Many of the women have died since 1991 and nowadays only twenty-six survivors with the average age of 92 are still alive. Major advocacy groups, including the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan (est. 1990), the House of Sharing, and international support groups and individuals have made strenuous efforts to bring this issue to the public. Yet the survivors have never been properly heard.[5] Lee was right when she observed many years ago: "My homeland was liberated, but we were not. We are still at war."

Only on December 28, 2015, the Japanese government offered the first official compensation through a secretive and sudden agreement with the South Korean government.[6] They called it "the final and irreversible resolution." Many commentators criticized this agreement because the survivors had not been consulted. The agreement also failed to concede the Japanese government's responsibility for the crime. To the survivors, the agreement was like a slap in the face. They were disappointed with the Korean government for not taking a stance on their behalf and for accepting the low compensation of 1 billion yen or approximately 8.3 million U.S. dollars. They bemoaned that none of the few survivors were involved in the consultations. A statement from Hiroka Shoji of Amnesty International sums up the position of the victim-survivors and supporters: "The women were missing from the negotiation table and they must

not be sold short in a deal that is more about political expediency than justice. Until the women get the full and unreserved apology from the Japanese government for the crimes committed against them, the fight for justice goes on."[7]

In our age of global convergence, an important premise of any negotiation ought to focus on open and honest communication. It should include listening to the interested parties and cooperating with them. We do not often see this kind of communication between the rulers and the common people. We certainly do not see it in the case of the "comfort women." As a feminist Korean Bible interpreter, I search for conversations between rulers and their people in the Bible. The story in 1 Kgs. 3:16–28 is such a conversation, as it depicts two women seeking justice from their king. Do they receive royal listening and justice? Unfortunately, both the biblical women and the comfort women in South Korea do not receive much listening or justice from their rulers. Rulers ignore them and make decisions for their personal convenience only. It is about time that readers of the biblical tale change this grave injustice and learn to listen to the suffering of oppressed women both in the Bible and in today's world. This essay fosters this hermeneutical stance.

Emphasizing the Centrality of the Two Women

Read with a feminist hermeneutics that listens to Korean comfort women, the story of 1 Kgs. 3:16–28 features two women as the central characters. Yet androcentric interpreters do not focus on the women when they identify the anonymous king as the famous, important, and wise King Solomon. Androcentric interpreters stress that this particular story appears in the midst of reports about Solomon. They maintain that the anonymous king must be Solomon. Yet in 1 Kgs. 3:16–28 all of the characters are anonymous. None of them are named. Thus the assertion that the anonymous king must be King Solomon is questionable because it minimizes the significance of the women. This claim also leads to the almost reflexive assumption that the famous king deserves only praise for his decision, illustrating King Solomon's wisdom.[8] The subtitles of many commentaries reflect this belief as they classify the king's decision when "A Wise Ruling" (NIV, OJB), "Solomon's Wisdom in Judgment" (NRSV), or "Solomon's Wise Judgment" (NKJV).[9] Yet the more the king is

praised, the less the women are heard or made visible. Androcentric readers also often note that the biblical tale includes characteristics found in many folktales around the world. It includes the common motif of two women claiming the same child and a judge who orders the splitting of the child in half or the pulling of the infant on both ends to give each woman half of the child. Commentators explain that the method represents a hidden emotional test to force each woman to give in to save the life of the child.

The popular androcentric assumption of viewing the king as the central character of the story is problematic for several reasons. It limits the interpretation to a patriarchal pattern in which the women illustrate the king's sophistication, power, and wisdom. The characterization of the biblical story as a riddle or a detective story commits the same fallacy.[10] For instance, Meir Sternberg believes that this biblical tale merges the two genres of a riddle and a test.[11] Hence, the young king must solve the juridical dilemma—a riddle—to pass the test and to be recognized as possessing divine wisdom. Other commentators also read the story as a riddle, as, for instance, Stuart Lasine who defines the story as a law-court riddle.[12] Yet the classification of 1 Kgs. 3:16–28 as a riddle or a detective story emphasizes the judge's abilities and classifies the women as mere props in the king's story. The androcentric habit of seeing incidents from the eyes of the "more important people" who are mostly men in esteemed and even royal positions ensures that readers do not recognize the significance of characters discarded as secondary, among them usually female characters.

This is a serious mistake. In this narrative two women are the main speakers and actors. They appear in almost every verse of the story. In fact, they appear in nine out of thirteen verses. They also initiate the trial. Their arrival and their insistence on a court trial begin the procedures. They interact boldly and directly with the king.[13] Many scholars take this direct interaction as an indication that the king cares about low-class people.[14] However, the evidence of the king's care for the two women is not obvious.[15] Rather, the women demand his attention. They give long speeches (3:17–22) that silence the king for a long time. In contrast, the king appears in only four out of thirteen verses. As the king tries to catch up with the women's stories, his first speech (3:23) merely repeats their speeches. The king becomes prominent only when he decides to use the sword. Even then the women are not silent. One of them makes the king leave her child alone and the other woman dares to scorn the king even at the critical moment of the sword. Importantly, the king gives the final verdict only after the women react. Although the king quiets the women and announces his verdict,

the women are the central players throughout the entire narrative.

Recognizing the Women's Close Relationship

Another literary feature strengthens the reading of the biblical tale from the perspective of the women. The narrator depicts the women as having a close relationship with each other. Although they are introduced as prostitutes, it is unclear whether they are prostitutes by profession or whether they are called prostitutes because they are unmarried, pregnant, or live together. Sometimes, the term "prostitute" (*zonah*) refers to a woman who is sexually autonomous and has a different lifestyle from the cultural norms in Israelite society.[16] In either case, the characterization of the women as prostitutes is one of the reasons for androcentric interpretations to ignore the women and to praise the king's wisdom. Labeling the women as prostitutes does not allow readers to listen carefully to the women. It is as if they should be dismissed for their marginal status. Similarly, the situation of "comfort women" should not be associated with negative judgment or shame. All of these women are victim-survivors who have been silenced for far too long.

Rather, the text depicts the women as having a close relationship with each other. Three textual clues indicate that the women are family and that the androcentric reading of the two women as rivals is a fallacy. First, the first woman implies that the second woman midwifed her childbirth. The literal translation of 3:17b, "I gave birth *with her* (*'immah*) in the house," sheds light on the situation.[17] As there is no one else in the house, the second woman, despite being close to labor herself, helps the first woman during her childbirth. It is a huge task for a woman who is on the brink of childbirth to serve as a midwife and to take care of a mother who just gave birth. Second, the first woman suggests that she midwifed the second woman's childbirth when she states in v. 18: "On the third day after I gave birth, this woman also gave birth. We were together." The second half of the verse reads: "There was no stranger with us in the house; only the two of us in the house" (v. 18b). Often the verse is interpreted as stating that there was no eyewitness. Yet in the context of childbirth, they helped and supported each other, risking their lives for each other. Third, the second woman cares about the first woman. We expect the second woman to refute the first woman's accusation. For instance, she could

have highlighted two logical contradictions in the first woman's explanation. The first woman cannot reasonably reconstruct the incident because she claims she was asleep.[18] Further, the first woman claims that she got up in the morning to nurse her son. The second woman could have used this statement of the first woman to demonstrate the first woman killed the child. She had laid on her own son during the night and did not realize it until it was too late in the morning. Instead, the second woman states: "No. Surely, my son is the living (one) and your son is the dead (one)" (v. 22). She neither attacks nor criticizes the first woman but she cares for her.

The seemingly calm response invites us to imagine a different version of the incident in which the accuser finds her child dead in the morning. It takes into account the women's close relationship. The accusing first woman panics, does not accept that she laid on her own child, and ends up with the conviction that the second woman laid on the child and swapped it during the night with her own infant. Accordingly, the second woman is saddened about her friend's mistake and confusion. She mourns the loss of the child whose birth she midwifed. She is despondent about her friend's claim of child swapping, but she maintains her calm. Her non-critical response prompts the first woman's short response. It is a chiastic repetition of the second woman's sentence and different from her previous long and emotional speech. She states: "No. Surely, your son is the dead (one) and my son is the living (one)" (v. 22).

The textual clues indicate that the women have a lot in common. Both of them are characterized as prostitutes and both of them live in the same house (3:16, 17). Both of them give birth to a son almost at the same time. Both women assist each other in childbirth (3:17, 18). Both of them put their child near to them while they sleep (3:20). Both women "get up" (*qum*; 3:20, 21). Both speak (3:22). The frequent use of the Hebrew word "house" (*bayit*) also shows their close physical relationship. In Hebrew, the word even means "family" (e.g. Gen. 7:1; Josh. 24:15; 1 Sam. 27:3),[19] and it appears four times in 1 Kgs. 3:16–28. The word thus suggests that the women are family to each other.

Yet their close relationship is endangered when one of the infants dies. At this moment their troubles begin. The first woman coldly calls her close friend and family member "this woman" (v. 16). The king's response does not help in this moment of crisis. This is also the moment in which readers need to listen to them, as the women cry out for resolution, justice, healing, and the next step in their lives. Importantly and in contrast, not every comfort woman registers her complaint. Among the comfort women who called out, some of them preferred to settle with meager compensation whereas other comfort women still demand

sincere apologies and full compensation from the Japanese government. Since their various and dwindling voices are disappearing, we need to listen to them more earnestly than ever.

Discovering the Ambiguity of Pronouns

Yet another literary feature offers support for a focus on the biblical women in 1 Kgs. 3:16–28. It relates to the ambiguous use of pronouns. When ambiguous pronouns refer to the women, the story seems to hint at the fact that the women and their concern do not matter much to the king. The king's use of pronouns is ambiguous in all of his speeches, as if to confuse everybody about which woman he is addressing. For instance, when the king speaks in verse 23, he uses the same demonstrative pronoun, "this," to refer to either woman: "*This* says, 'This is my son the living and your son is the dead. And *this* says, 'No. Surely your son is the dead and my son is the living.'"[20] The king also reverses the order of the women's speeches so that the king's use of the same demonstrative pronoun for either woman makes the women undistinguishable in the text. In addition, the king's speech is a monologue as if to suggest that, to him, the women are indistinguishable and he is not interested in their respective stories. After his monologue, the king orders a sword and to cut the child into two halves. In his command the king uses the pronoun "one" (*'eḥad*) for both women, stating: "Cut the living child into two. Give the half to *one* and the half to *one*."[21] The order implies that each woman gets half of the child, but again the women's identities are unclear. To the king, they are a nuisance, and he wants to get rid of them as soon as possible.

Yet the ambiguous use of pronouns reaches its climax only at the order of the king to distribute one half of the child to each woman. After the king commands the child to be cut in two, the birthmother appeals: "Please my lord, give her the living child and never let him die!" (3:26a). Then, "this" (woman) says, 'Also to me, also to you he will not belong. Cut!'" (3:26b). Thereupon the king orders: "Give to her the living child. Never let him die. She is his mother." Again, ambiguous pronouns abound. Who is "her" and "she" in the king's judgment? Is she the accuser who first appears by giving a long speech or is she the second woman who gives a short speech? Who is the birthmother and who gives the last speech? The narrator does not disclose who is who, leaving the conclusion wide open. The reader has to play three-card Monte.[22] Pronoun ambiguities ensure that the identity of the biological mother is unclear. Some interpreters find the

plaintiff convincing, reasonable, and polite, and determine that she is the "true" mother.[23] Others believe the defendant is the real mother.[24] Due to the ambiguity, I suggest that the king addresses the woman who speaks right before his speech. If so, the king fails to identify the biological mother of the living child and ends up giving the child to the wrong mother.

What should readers think of a royal judge who uses pronouns confusingly in his court where precise wording is essential to judge with fairness and in justice? The ambiguous use of pronouns suggests that the authority of the king needs to be deconstructed. He is careless in his use of pronouns as he is insensitive to the women. No wonder the woman's final word commands the king: "Cut!" (3:26b). Readers should not take literarily the harsh sounding response of "this" woman. Her speech should be understood rhetorically. Perhaps her response is better understood as saying: "Wanna cut the child? Go ahead! Suit yourself!" She expresses her anger about, disappointment with, and opposition to the king who handles their case hastily and with vague pronouns.[25] She sounds like comfort women who even in the midst of their diseases and dying adamantly refuse double-tongued apologies and cheap negotiations.

Investigating the Topsy-Turvy Trial

Yet another literary clue for the women's effort to be listened to is the topsy-turvy trial that lacks proper process before the verdict is announced. An autopsy of the dead child did not exist. Hence, neither the cause nor the time of the infant's death are known. The crime scene is not investigated as police work did not exist. There is no evidence, no witness, and no cross-examination. The king plays the trinity of the judge, the defense lawyer, and the prosecutor. The king never asks the women any questions. The women mostly speak to each other rather than to the judge. If the plaintiff told the truth, the defendant should be punished for involuntary manslaughter, kidnapping the living child, and swapping the infant with the dead one. There is also no proof that the first woman tells the truth. If she told a lie, she would make the defendant suffer the unfairness of a false accusation. She would also mock the court. In that case, a second trial for the false accusation should follow. In the end, no crime is named and no sentence is pronounced. The king fails to judge the authenticity of the initial accusation. His trial is based on the women's words and reactions. The story begins with the charge that a criminal swapped the dead child with the living one. The story ends with the king's judgment that gives the living child to

one of the mothers, but it is unclear whether she is the first or the second woman. It seems likely that the king gives the child to the woman who is not the biological mother.

Another literary feature, contributing to the topsy-turvy trial process, relates to the appearance of the sword as a decisive factor in the trial. The sword has two blades. Most readers believe that the king uses the sword only as a prop. They assume that he only threatens to kill the infant with the sword but never intends to use it.[26] Scholars defend this reading even when they criticize the king's use of the sword as a prop.[27] Some interpreters advise not guessing whether the king would have gone ahead with the execution if the true mother had not made her offer.[28] James Kugel asks who is stupid enough to believe that the king would divide the child in two.[29] These comments indicate that Western scholars have not experienced dictatorship and human atrocities in their own lives. Another possibility should be seriously considered. The king is ready to use the sword to divide the child and the birth mother takes his threat seriously. If she was confident that the king merely threatened to kill the child, she would not be willing to give up her son. In fact, other narratives in 1 Kings describe Solomon using his sword in murderous ways. He consolidates his reign by killing his brother Adonijah, General Joab, and Shimei who oppose David. In light of the violent actions of the king in these stories, readers should believe the king is ready to kill, this time an infant, especially since the topsy-turvy trial lacks any investigation of the incident and critical elements in the trial demonstrate that the women do not receive a fair trial. The women's courtroom situation is not very different from what the comfort women have experienced. They, too, have not received a trial for the war crimes they had to endure many decades ago.

Uncovering the Failure of the "Listening Heart"

Another literary element communicates the significance of reading with the women in the story. It raises the question whether the story illustrates the king's wisdom or folly. Importantly, the story of Solomon who receives wisdom from God at Gibeon (1 Kings 3) appears directly after the story in which David attributes a particular meaning to wisdom (1 Kings 2). In light of this literary placement of 1 Kings 3, exegetes often observe that Solomon's wisdom is

similar to David's.[30] David mentions wisdom as he makes his last words to Solomon. He instructs his son what to do with Joab, the sons of Barzillai, and Shimei. Earlier, Barzillai helps David at a crucial moment in his life, and so David asks Solomon to respect the sons of Barzillai. David does not explicitly mention "wisdom" when he instructs Solomon about the Barzillais, but he uses "wisdom" when he asks Solomon to kill Joab and Shimei. In fact, David says about Joab: "Act therefore according to your wisdom, but do not let his gray head go down to Sheol in peace" (1 Kgs. 2:6). David talks about Shimei in a similar way: "You are a wise man; you will know what you ought to do to him, and you must bring his gray head down with blood to Sheol" (1 Kgs. 2:9). Consequently, Solomon gets rid of Joab and Shimei at the end of 1 Kings 2. The wisdom that David teaches Solomon is thus not the wisdom in the sense of being wise. Rather, it ought to be understood as a shrewd way of life and as the skill of getting rid of problems quickly, by means of violence or by any means necessary.

Another literary detail addresses the difficulty for readers to be certain that the king is indeed a wise king. In 1 Kgs. 3:9 Solomon asks God for wisdom. In Hebrew this kind of wisdom is expressed with the phrase of "a listening heart." It appears right before the story of the two women. On the surface, the king handles the women's case with the wisdom he just received from God.[31] But on a deeper level, his "wise" decision to employ the sword in 1 Kings 3 turns out to be the same dangerous "wisdom" of 1 Kings 2.[32] The question is whether he really listens to the women during the trial. Hugh Pyper's sums up the point: "Solomon stops to listen to the pleas of the woman and is prepared to reach his conclusion."[33] The king does not ask what each woman hopes to get from the trial. He also does not give them enough time to tell their stories. Instead, he deals with them roughly and quickly.[34] Above all, he does not treat them with full respect. To him, they are lower-class women who live together without husbands, none of which is advantageous to getting through to the king's ears. In other words, he is not a particularly wise ruler. Similarly, the majority of the powerful and the wise of both Korean and Japanese governments do not listen to the comfort women. They have failed to take women seriously and to give them the respect they deserve.

Another moment depicts the questionable nature of the king's wisdom. Toward the end of the tale, the word "wisdom" appears in the response of the people. Verse 28 reads: "All Israel heard the judgment the king judged and they were afraid before the king, because they saw that God's wisdom to do judgment was in him." In other words, the people who are absent during the trial learn that

the king threatens to use the sword and to quickly decide the case before him. The people must have dreaded the king because he exercises his power so recklessly. Admittedly, this reading seems to contradict the next rationale of verse 28 which states: "because they saw that God's wisdom to do judgment was in him." Yet this line is perhaps a covert subversion with which the narrator hides the subversive meaning of the story.[35] Eric Seibert, identifying various texts written by "subversive scribes,"[36] explains that sometimes writers pose as subversive scribes when they write about royal activities. After all, a king hired them, and so the scribes resorted to subversion to express dissatisfaction with actions and words of their rulers.

More specifically, subversive scribes intended to erode the legitimacy of the rulers by criticizing official policies and practices. Concealed subversion functions to offer consensus, cohesion, or entertainment for like-minded insiders, and so some readers detect the hidden critique while others remain unaware of it. Although Seibert does not list 1 Kgs. 3:16–28 as a scribal subversion story, his idea fits this tale. On the surface, the text praises the king. However, it also contains numerous literary landmines that ridicule and criticize the king. Accordingly, verse 28 protects the narrator from the rage of the ruler. One verse seems to praise the king by using an excessive compliment, "God's wisdom," but the story as a whole describes the king as a tyrant who does not care for the people in his courthouse. It is as if the people talk behind his back in a scornful way: "Oh yea, he has *God*-given wisdom! Believe it or not." After all, as Pyper observes, the king wants to finish the case quickly and his concern is not to rule with justice.[37] Since the story does not include reactions from the women to the ruling, it is impossible to know whether they appreciate the royal verdict. It seems likely that the women are upset because they feel unheard, ignored, and uncomforted.

In short, the story is a parody about the political ideology of rulers. It makes fun of the Gibeon story that presents Solomon's wisdom as coming from God (1 Kgs. 3:1–15). Read accordingly, the narrative depicts people's response to the new king. They want the emperor to execute justice, but he disappoints them. The king's "listening heart" fails them, and so the noun "wisdom" appears only once at the very end of the story (v. 28). In contrast, words with the root meaning of "life" and "death" occur eight and eleven times respectively. In other words, this biblical story is more about life and death than about wisdom. As the king tries to wrap the people around his little finger, the people need to be careful about him so that they survive in his empire. The story warns people about their foolish, unilateral, and dangerous leaders. The fact that the terrible atrocities

done against teen girls are not resolved when the women are in their 90s shows how unwise, unable, and unreliable political leaders are even today.[38]

Women under Blades and Blazes: A Conclusion

The Korean context of the "comfort women" helps to rethink the interpretation of 1 Kgs. 3:16–28. For far too long, interpreters of this biblical narrative side with the king. It is time that the women receive their due attention. Just as the two biblical women are central in their trial story, the Korean "comfort women" ought to be regarded as the agents of their legal cases against the Japanese government. Most importantly, the stories of all of these women must be told from their perspectives. When readers sideline oppressed women as the main characters, often they marginalize them in favor of concerns about national security or foreign relations. Instead, we have to listen to marginalized women when they stand before the rulers of their societies. When we read 1 Kgs. 3:16–28 accordingly, various literary features and characteristics become significant. They pertain to the roles and close relationship of the women, the ambiguous uses of pronouns, the topsy-turvy trial proceedings, the quick judgment of the king, his willingness to rely upon a violent political strategy, and the people's fearful response. All of these elements discredit the hegemonic reading that the king judged the women's case with divine wisdom. The propaganda of the king's wisdom turns out to be satire against his violence. It caricatures a foolish king who almost kills an innocent child and who does not listen to the women. The king's inability to identify the birth mother of the living child, to find an offender, and to sentence without violence ridicules his authority and power. His inability to speak clearly and his willingness to kill the child add to his incompetence. Read with a feminist hermeneutics, the story invites readers to subvert and scoff at the foolish and incompetent king who ignores public sentiments. The story turns into a warning to the common people to beware those in power.

Women and innocent victims in many corners of the world endure many forms of oppression and violence. Who will use a true "listening heart" and give their ears to women and the oppressed? Who will lift the sword from them and pull them out of the fire? Since 1992, the victim-survivors of Japanese military sexual slavery demonstrate every Wednesday in front of the Japanese embassy in

Seoul City, Korea. After twenty-six years of demonstrations and consistent domestic and international efforts, they have yet to be heard fully and with empathy. Just as the story of the two women in 1 Kgs. 3:16–28 awaits the listening ears of readers, the "comfort women" also ask for a full hearing, full apologies, and full compensation. Yet the biblical story teaches that powerful people, usually men, do not listen to women, especially women with little power and low status in the public sphere.

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[1] A volunteer man at the House of Sharing, Cho Jung-rae, was shocked to see the painting in 2002. He was a movie director and made up his mind to put the tragedy of the survivors into a movie as cultural evidence. Several Korean conservative politicians threatened him not to make the movie. However, crowd funding and volunteer actresses and actors made it possible for the movie, "Spirit's Homecoming," to come out in 2016. The first viewers were the survivors at the House of Sharing. Contrary to the concerns of the director, they wanted to see the movie, commenting on the various scenes throughout the screening of the movie. After the movie one of the survivors stated: "Not even one 100th of my experiences was expressed in the movie." For the full interview, see http://www.newsen.com/news_view.php?uid=201709051535226710 [accessed September 15, 2018].

[2] See, e.g., Mordechai Cogan, *1 Kings* (Anchor Bible; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 196; Terrence Fretheim, *First and Second Kings* (Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1999), 33–5.

[3] The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines "ambiguity" as "a word or expression that can be understood in two or more possible ways." Available at http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ambiguity [accessed on October 1, 2018].

[4] Lee Ok-Seon's testimony comes from Esther Felden's articles, entitled "Former Comfort Woman Tells Uncomforting Story," *Deutsche Welle* (February 9, 2013), available at http://www.dw.com/en/former-comfort-woman-tells-uncomforting-story/a-17060384; and "'Comfort Women': The Wounds of their Lives," *Deutsche Welle* (January 15, 2016), available at http://www.dw.com/en/comfort-women-the-wounds-of-their-lives/a-18982702. Several Korean testimonies appear on the official website of the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan. Available at https://www.womenandwar.net/contents/custom/testimony/testimony.asp?page_str_menu=040401.

[5] In 1993, the Japanese government commissioned and published a study that officially recognized the existence of sexual slaves and the role of Japanese soldiers. After its publication, the Japanese government apologized on multiple occasions. However, the Japanese government never admitted its guilt, and it also did not properly offer any official financial compensation.

[6] At the time, President Park Geun Hye of the conservative party led the government. In spring 2017, she became the first impeached president who was imprisoned for eighteen charges, including bribery, coercion, abuse of office, and illegal leaking of government secrets.

[7] "'Comfort women' deal must not deny survivors justice"; available at https://www.amnestyusa.org/press-releases/comfort-women-deal-must-not-deny-survivors-justice/ [accessed September 20, 2018].

[8] See, e.g., Cogan, *1 Kings*, 196; Fretheim, *First and Second Kings*, 33–5.

[9] Three major Korean translated Bibles title the story as "Solomon's Judgment" and do not include "wise" or "wisdom."

[10] Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature; Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), 166–8; Stuart Lasine, "The Riddle of Solomon's Judgment and the Riddle of Human Nature in the Hebrew Bible," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 45 (1989); Gary A. Rendsburg, "The Guilty Party in 1 Kings III 16–28," *Vetus Testamentum* 48 (1998): 534–41.

[11] Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 167.

[12] Lasine, "The Riddle of Solomon's Judgment and the Riddle of Human Nature in the Hebrew Bible," 61.

[13] Some cases in which the king interacts directly with people from the lower classes in a trial exist in the ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible. In the sagas of *Krt* and *'Aqht* in the Ras Shamra texts, the kings sit in the place of public access and judge the case of a widow, an orphan, and the oppressed; see John Gray, *I and II Kings: A Commentary* (The Old Testament Library; second ed.; London: SCM Press, 1970). The story of David and the woman from Tekoa in 2 Samuel 14 is another biblical example.

[14] For instance, Fretheim argues that the story focuses on Solomon's ability to execute justice and to demonstrate his concern for personal and local matters; see his *First and Second Kings*, 34.

[15] Some scholars evaluate the king's interaction with prostitutes negatively. For instance, J. Daniel Hays suggests that this judgment story does not praise but criticizes Solomon, as both Deuteronomy and Leviticus outlaw prostitution; see his "Has the Narrator Come to Praise Solomon or to Bury Him? Narrative Subtlety in 1 Kings 1–11," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 28.2 (2003): 164. Another exegete, Marvin A. Sweeney, views Solomon as the chief magistrate. Sweeney considers Solomon as a model for the abuse of power perpetrated by David in stories such as 2 Samuel 11–12 and 2 Samuel 15; see his *I & II*

Kings: A Commentary (Old Testament Library; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 82.

[16] For instance, Oholah and Oholibah are figurative women, i.e. the nations of Israel and Judah, in Ezekiel 23. They are described as "playing the whore" when they go out with figurative men, i.e. other nations.

[17] The NRSV translates 3:17b as "and I gave birth while she was in the house," rendering the Hebrew word, *'immah*, as "while she was."

[18] Many scholars note the discrepancy of the plaintiffs. However, the Septuagint omits the phrase "and your maidservant was asleep" because, according to the translators, the plaintiff is the true mother of the living child. The translators sought to eliminate the contradiction; see, e.g., Lasine, "The Riddle of Solomon's Judgment and the Riddle of Human Nature in the Hebrew Bible," 67.

[19] Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (vol. 1; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 125. Moshe Garsiel states that the repetition of the word "house" (four times) shows the closeness of the women. "Revealing and Concealing as a Narrative Strategy in Solomon's Judgment (1 Kings 3:16–28)." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 64.2 (2002): 239.

[20] English translations of this passage often distinguish the women by adding vocabulary, such as "the first woman" and "the other woman" or "this one" and "that one."

[21] NRSV, NKJV, and NASB distinguished the women in 3:25 as "one" and "the other." For the usage of *'eḥad* as "one" and "the other," see Koehler and Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 30.

[22] Richard D. Nelson proposes that the first woman is the real mother because she is compassionate, but his next comment expresses his doubt: "But wait! Is the reader being fooled in the process? We cannot be sure if our favorite first speaker really is the woman of compassion"; see Richard D. Nelson, *First and Second Kings* (Interpretation; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1987), 38.

[23] Simon J. DeVries, *1 Kings* (Word Biblical Commentary 12; Dallas, TX: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 58; Garsiel, "Revealing and Concealing as a Narrative Strategy in Solomon's Judgment (1 Kings 3:16–28)," 244–6. Burke O. Long, *1 Kings: With an Introduction to Historical Literature* (FOTL 9; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 67–70; Herbert C. Brichto, *Toward a Grammar of Biblical Poetics: Tales of the Prophets* (New York, NY / Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 47–63.

[24] Rendsburg, "The Guilty Party in 1 Kings III 16–28." Ilya and Gila Leibowitz, "Solomon's Judgment" (in Hebrew), *Beth Mikra* 35 (1990): 242–4; Efraim Y. Wizenberg, "Solomon's Judgment" (in Hebrew), *Mv Hamidrashia* 9–10 (1973): 41–2. Quoted from Garsiel, "Revealing and Concealing," 233.

[25] *Contra* Hugh Pyper who thinks this woman is cannibalistic; see his "Judging the Wisdom of Solomon: The Two-Way Effect of Intertextuality," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 59 (1993): 25–36. Also *contra* DeVries who argues that "the other harlot typifies the meanness of which the human spirit is capable. She can do nothing but hate, hate, hate"; see DeVries, *1 Kings*, 58.

[26] For Cogan, the king cleverly creates a threat. See his *I King*, 154; for Garsiel, the king uses a "nonconventional solution." See "Revealing and Concealing," 247.

[27] Gina Hens-Piazza puts it this way: Solomon's judicial strategy is a "dangerous move … a cruel trick that blackmails motherhood"; see her *1–2 Kings* (Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries; Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 46.

[28] See, e.g., DeVries, *1 Kings*, 61.

[29] James Kugel, *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2007), 505.

[30] Pyper, “Judging the Wisdom of Solomon,” 31; Joel Rosenberg, *King and Kin: Political Allegory in the Hebrew Bible* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 186; Walter Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Kings* (Smyth & Helwys Commentary; Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), 54.

[31] DeVries believes that the main theme of the story is the wise king. The king is like God and has a godlike wisdom; see DeVries, *1 Kings*, 60, 62.

[32] Brueggemann puts it this way: “Solomon’s ‘wisdom’ from God is not ‘nice’. … In the end this wisdom turns out to be self-destructive foolishness in masquerade”; see Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, 55.

[33] Pyper, “Judging the Wisdom of Solomon,” 33.

[34] Ellen Van Wolde explains that the king’s attitude, his willingness to use his sword, his harsh words, and his instant action do not make it easy for readers to empathize with him; see her “Who Guides Whom? Embeddedness and Perspective in Biblical Hebrew and in 1 Kings 3:16–28,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 114.4 (1995): 637.

[35] See Eric A. Seibert, *Subversive Scribes and the Solomonic Narrative: A Rereading of 1 Kings 1–11* (Library of Hebrew Bible Studies 436; London: T&T Clark, 2006).

[36] Ibid., 19, 63–66, and passim.

[37] Pyper, “Judging the Wisdom of Solomon,” 33.

[38] The new president of Korea, Moon Jae-in, criticized the controversial 2015 deal on wartime “comfort women” and set a national day in their memory. In his speech at the first official ceremony on August 14, 2018, he said that this issue cannot “be solved through diplomatic solutions between the two countries. … It is an issue that can be solved only when the world, including ourselves and Japan, deeply reflects on sexual violence against all women and human rights problems and comes to a strong awareness and learns a lesson in a way that prevents this from ever repeating again” [retrieved September 27, 2018, from https://english1.president.go.kr/BriefingSpeeches/Speeches/60].

CHAPTER 8

READING THE BIBLE FROM BELOW IN THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION

RAINER KESSLER

THE era of globalization challenges biblical scholars of all backgrounds to wrestle with the economic issues as they appear in the Bible. As a German Old Testament professor, I take seriously the fact that since the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 the economic forces of globalization do not face any obstacles of restraint anymore. I noticed the might of unhinged economic exploitation when I visited Chile for the first time in 1989. My visit was prior to the events in my native country and sixteen years after General Pinochet's September 11, 1973, *coup d'état* against the legitimate government of President Salvador Allende. Pinochet had produced the first experiment of neoliberalism and economic globalization in the world, leading to the closure of huge industrial plants that once produced not only train wagons for the country and its Latin American neighbors but also offered thousands of jobs. Chilean fishermen found themselves unable to compete with industrialized fishing fleets that hailed from nations around the world, and whose trawling nets caught every fish in their ways. Thus, entire Chilean families lost their income which then led to further hardship: sometimes Chilean daughters had to prostitute themselves to foreign sailors to make a living for themselves and their families. In light of these and many other political and economic developments that the term "globalization" captures, this essay suggests that Bible scholars need to read biblical texts in solidarity with ordinary readers who face incredible situations of economic and political injustice and exploitation.

That the Bible ought to be read from below is not a new insight. The first movement of "popular readings" of the Bible started in the late 1970s in Latin America. Communities of so-called ordinary readers who had no theological or exegetical training read the Bible together, and professional scholars introduced the results of these readings into their scholarship. In Brazil, Carlos Mesters founded CEBI (= Centro de Estudos Bíblicos), the center for biblical studies that organized meetings and collected the results.[1] A group of Latin American biblical scholars decided to found a new journal to promote a dialog between "popular readings" and scholarly exegesis. In 1988, the first volume of RIBLA (= Revista de Interpretación Bíblica Latino-Americana) appeared. It was dedicated to the popular reading of the Bible in Latin America. Pablo Richard from Argentina developed what he named "liberation hermeneutics" of the popular reading.[2] Post-colonial readings were later added to the traditional popular readings of Latin American base communities. The perspective of the non-Western diaspora in the West deepened the perspective of the non-Western world. Fernando Segovia subsumed both perspectives under the notion of "the margins."[3] Although popular readings in the tradition of liberation theology and post-colonial studies are not identical, they are "companions in struggle."[4]

On the African continent, Musa W. Dube from Botswana and Gerald West from South Africa are pioneers in reading the Bible with "ordinary readers." The results of these readings appear in several volumes.[5] Dube and West explain the meaning of ordinary readers when they state: "The term 'ordinary' is used in a general and a specific sense. The general includes all readers who read the Bible pre-critically. We also use the term 'ordinary' to designate a particular sector of pre-critical readers, those readers who are poor and marginalized."[6] Dube stresses that "reading from below" is a question not only of class but also of gender. Accordingly, she organized special readings with African women.[7]

Yet in spite of this rich tradition of reading the Bible from below, the academic field of biblical studies has unfortunately not been open to reading against economic and political structures of globalization that exploit and dominate ordinary people, whether they live in Latin America, Africa, the United States, Europe, or other parts of the world. Some scholars bring popular and academic readings closer to each other. One of those scholars is Hans de Wit from The Netherlands who initiated two worldwide reading processes. They resulted in two volumes that combine ordinary readings with academic discussion.[8] Another volume, co-edited by de Wit and Gerald O. West, brings together African and European readings.[9] Still, what needs to be acknowledged

is that mainstream academia is not prepared to welcome these efforts to create dialog between ordinary and scholarly readers.

Yet this essay aims to seek such a dialog by giving full attention to ordinary readings of the Bible in an academic setting. Two main sections structure the discussion. The first section, focusing on economic neoliberalism in biblical scholarship, outlines the obstacles that readings from below encounter in academia. The second section discusses the benefits of readings from below.

The Debate over Economic Neoliberalism in Biblical Scholarship

The economic discourse on neoliberal globalization has led many biblical scholars to investigate the Bible's economic perspectives, especially in the prophetic literature. Yet often Bible scholars fiercely oppose readings that focus on social justice and economic equality. They assume the reality of neoliberal globalization and thus defend capitalist principles in the socio-political establishment of ancient Israel. One of the boldest approaches comes from Morris Silver who portrays ancient Israel as a proto-capitalist economy.[10] An economist, specializing in ancient economies, Silver advises historians of ancient Israelite economy "to spend more time looking at modern economic theory and the evidence for market-oriented behaviour."[11] He believes that "[t]he Israelite economy of the eighth-seventh centuries was by no means primitive. It was a living economy whose entrepreneurs … responded positively and rationally to market opportunities."[12] Silver portrays ancient Judah as a prosperous country in which debt slavery was a beneficial institution "whereby the poor but ambitious individual could gain access to capital by self-sale."[13] Silver knows that the economic situation of ancient Israel is usually described in much more negative terms than he describes it. Silver, however, attributes the negative portrayals of ancient Israel's economic situation to skewed depictions in the prophetic literature and liberal-minded Bible historians. For instance, he declares: "Modern liberal-minded attitudes, more or less closely linked to the prophecies of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and Ezekiel are … the main source of negativism regarding the eighth and seventh centuries."[14] In Silver's view, biblical prophets and lawgivers of the Torah tried "to nullify the laws of economy and society."[15] He speculates that "these well-meaning but uncomprehending efforts backfired disastrously"[16] when prophets and legislators

initiated a "process of total social destruction in the name of total social justice."[17] He states that Israel and Judah were not destroyed "because the prophetic counsel was ignored": "as an economist and social scientist, I can testify that whatever its presumed moral virtues, the advice of the classical prophets was destructive from the standpoint of economic affluence and political strength."[18]

In other words, Silver favors the geopolitics of economic exploitation and imperial politics and thus advances the principle of economic effectiveness as a hermeneutical reading strategy. He assumes that the economic ideology of the prophets led to the destruction of ancient Israel as a geo-political entity. This ideology prevented ancient Israel from prospering as a country, and so Israel eventually succumbed to the economically and politically stronger nations that adhered to economic power and political strength. Their ideological stance stood in contrast to biblical notions of social justice.

Although Silver's position is an extreme example of a pro-neoliberal hermeneutical stance, his is not the only case favoring the neoliberal economic model. Some thirty years later, in 2012, Philippe Guillaume begins from the opposite starting point. Yet his conclusion is similar to Silver's conclusion.[19] Guillaume explains that ancient Israel was a typical agrarian society of antiquity. Already in 2003, Eckart Otto points to the temporal distance between the biblical and the modern era when he stresses "the historical distance of an ancient text to the present marked by the secular rationalism of world domination (*die historische Abständigkeit eines antiken Textes zur Gegenwart einer modernen Gesellschaft des säkularen Rationalismus der Weltbeherrschung*)."[20] Like Otto, Guillaume accuses contemporary exegetes of "class-struggle romanticism" that repeats "a number of slogans" and "untested assumptions,"[21] and regards Israelite prophets as "the heroes of the tale."[22] Guillaume, too, does not deny the existence of debt-slavery, exploitation, or indebtedness in ancient Israel but he considers these practices as more or less beneficial. He explains: "The aim is not to deny the existence of exploitation. Exploitation is always resented as extortion and injustice by the exploited, but exploitation and taxation are signs of economic health that benefit everyone, albeit in different proportions."[23] Thus, in his view, indebtedness "has in fact always been the norm … and … constitutes the mark of a healthy economy rather than the sign of a structural crisis."[24] The economic belief that indebtedness is beneficial to the economy of ancient Israel has hermeneutical consequences. For instance, Guillaume explains that the actions of the creditor in 2 Kgs. 4:1–7 ought to be seen as "a charitable act out of

which neither party made a fortune."[25] In fact, Guillaume explains that readers will "run the risk of appearing as naïve armchair idealists with little grip on reality" if they oppose the reading that "seeks to introduce a measure of realism in the exegesis of biblical texts relative to economic life in ancient Israel."[26] Guillaume thus buys into the neoliberal notion of economic exploitation and taxation as positive signs of a functioning economic system, applies those ideas to biblical interpretation, and then chastises other readers for losing their grip on the socio-economic reality in ancient Israel if they disagree with his reading.

Certainly, Silver and Guillaume are not the only scholars who analyze ancient Israelite society from a neoliberal, economic stance. Another exegete is the German biblical exegete, Ernst-Axel Knauf, for whom the conflict "between winners and losers of modernization (*zwischen Modernisierungs-Gewinnern und Modernisierungs-Verlierern*)" represents the heart of ancient Israel's socio-political problems.[27] Knauf admits that the inhabitants of Israelite cities became much richer than people in the countryside during the eighth century BCE. Yet he also insists that not this fact "but its moral valuation (*nicht der Sachverhalt ist strittig … , sondern dessen moralische Bewertung*)" is disputed. To Knauf, the prophetic literature and the rigid laws of the Torah ought to be understood as an expression of the protest of hillbillies who no longer understand their increasingly complex society and not as a general description of the socio-political situation in ancient Israel. In other words, Knauf's historical reconstruction marginalizes biblical texts about social justice as protest literature that did not represent the majority position in ancient Israel.

This kind of historical reconstruction finds acclaim in historical critical scholarship and has led to repeated dismissals of the prophetic literature for not offering realistic portrayals of Israelite society. For instance, according to the British exegete Lester Grabbe prophetic oracles are unreliable. He states: "The prophets seem to inveigh against everyone. Whatever else you may say about the pre-exilic prophets, they were generally … curmudgeons. There is no favouritism: they hate everybody."[28] The prophetic books are thus sidelined as political literature, and they are to be ignored in economic depictions of ancient Israelite society.

In sum, many nonbiblical and biblical scholars endorse economic principles favored in our era of neoliberal globalization. Thus, exegetes often project contemporary economic ideas back into their readings and, in the process, they also reject interpretations that identify social-justice principles as central in the Bible. Even worse, such interpreters attribute social-justice principles to "modern liberal-minded attitudes"[29] or to "theological wolves in the guise of

sociological lambs."[30] Grabbe's critique is perhaps extreme in its wording, but it can be found in many neoliberal exegetical treatises. For instance, Grabbe criticizes the social-justice analysis of the Bible as "rising out of preoccupations of the 60s liberal challenge to the establishment."[31] Similarly, Otto believes that social-justice oriented exegetes are social romantics who rediscover "class-struggle romanticism of early capitalism in the social critique of the prophets (*Klassenkampfromantik des Frühkapitalismus in der prophetischen Sozialkritik*)."[32] Furthermore, Guillaume speaks of "the class-struggle romanticism of the exegetical defenders of the poor"[33] who, in his view, select "a naive paraphrase of pet biblical texts passed as a historical perspective."[34] To these defenders of the neoliberal ideology, their opponents pose "as modern prophets,"[35] certainly an absurd characterization of those who read the Bible in solidarity with ordinary readers, most of whom are poor.

In my view, neoliberal adherents target the Bible and not biblical exegetes. For instance, Silver admits that the "modern liberal-minded attitudes," which he criticizes, are "more or less closely linked to the prophecies of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and Ezekiel."[36] He claims that the social legislation of the Bible is inspired by those prophets in their "well-meaning but uncomprehending efforts."[37] In the view of Silver and his colleagues, the Bible is historically outdated, and its ethics are an obstacle for developing an effective and functioning contemporary neoliberal-capitalist economy. Yet these scholars are not wrong in one aspect. The Bible is indeed a document from the pre-modern era, and its social ethics opposes economic effectiveness because the Bible favors social justice over economic affluence. As Knauf admits, the evaluation of this fact depends on one's opinion. To those profiting from the neoliberal economic system, the biblical claim for social justice is counterproductive. Seen from below, the biblical claim is self-evident. Thus, Guillaume observes correctly that "[e]xploitation is always resented as extortion and injustice by the exploited."[38] He contends that "exploitation and taxation are signs of economic health that benefit everyone." He also adds: "[A]lbeit in different proportions."[39] He certainly is not an "objective economist," and clearly sides with those who profit from the neoliberal economic system. The question is what changes if we do not side with the winners but stand in solidarity with the victims of globalization. The next section discusses why biblical readings from below teach academic and scholarly readers to understand better the ramifications of the Bible.

In my opinion, three insights help academic readers to be in solidarity with ordinary readers who suffer economic, political, and social exploitation and oppression today. The three insights relate first to discussions of global asynchrony; second, to the phenomenon that, in contrast to views about reality as being veiled, biblical texts depict reality as being unveiled; and third, to the fact that women are the first victims of oppressive and exploitative structures of domination in ancient times and today. All three insights assert that biblical texts offer adequate depictions of reality even for today.

First Insight: Global Asynchrony

In 2003, the Swiss philosopher and ethicist Thomas Kesselring coined the term "global asynchrony."[40] The phrase "global asynchrony" means that fully developed economies exist next to developing economies and economies on a low level of development, according to the standards of contemporary industrial capitalism. In other words, on the global level economic development is asynchronous and does not appear in a developmentally linear fashion. The phenomenon of global asynchrony benefits Bible readers who live in less developed societies. In a fully developed industrialized society, the Bible appears to be an outdated text, and so its application to actual questions demands a hermeneutical procedure. Yet to people living in a society with a low level of economic development, the Bible depicts circumstances that are quite similar to their own. Several biblical issues that are related to economic injustice and exploitation in the Bible and impoverished reading contexts come to mind. They relate to the existence of debt-slavery, the problem of land loss, unjust and delayed payment of wages and the lack of worker's rights, the migration of people and their families, the destruction of family structures, and the prevalence of absolutely impoverished people forced to live as beggars or thieves.

First, the issue of debt-slavery of children, as it appears in the biblical story of Elisha and the widow (2 Kgs. 4:1–7), is a reality for thousands of people in Pakistan, India, the Philippines, and many other Asian countries. Even today creditors take away children of indebted families and force the children to work

in carpet factories, in mines, or as pearl divers. When the enslaved child dies because of harsh working conditions, the debt holder returns to the family and takes the next child, if the debt is not yet fully repaid. Families suffering such a fate immediately understand the point of the story about Elisha and the widow, and they do not need additional explanations. Their comprehension of the unjust economic structures as culpable of the child's fate is immediate and direct.

Second, another issue of global asynchrony that accommodates ordinary readers' understanding of the Bible relates to the issue of land loss. For the majority of people living in the industrial and administrative centers of the world, the issue of land distribution is abstract. Yet in many African countries the problem of land-grabbing is a contemporary issue for small farmers. When they lose their land, they have to work as wageworkers on farms owned by somebody else. Hence, small farmers see their troubles described in the book of Isaiah: "Ah, you who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is room for no one but you, and you are left to live alone in the midst of the land" (Isa. 5:8, NRSV). Small farmers who lose their land also understand the hopes expressed in the law of Leviticus 25 that promises the restitution of land. African exegete Temba Mafico underlines the similarity of the concept about land ownership in ancient Israel and modern Africa when he states: "Traditions of land ownership in Africa and ancient Israel have as their foundation the basic idea expressed in Ps. 24:1–2: that God, the creator and founder of the earth, all living things and all that is in it, is the primary owner of the land."[41] Mafico's Zimbabwean colleague, Robert Wafawanaka, thus explains: "Leviticus 25:23 states unequivocally, 'The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me.'"[42] Later he adds: "The problem of land possession is timeless and without national boundaries."[43] This statement is correct in principal, but people from the center, especially members of academia, need to hear from marginalized readers in order to learn about this economic reality still prevalent today. For readers from below, the problem of land possession is not timeless but an urgent question. Another Bible scholar also observes the similarities between the Bible and impoverished women in Brazil, as they relate to land loss. Susann Schüepp reports that both poor Brazilian women and biblical women lack access to arable land. In Brazil a significant movement of landless peasants exists (*Movimento Sem Terra*). To the people of this movement, the Exodus story speaks directly about their lives, as they observe: "[T]he Exodus says a lot to peasants today: the search for land, a land flowing with milk and honey (*o Êxodo fala muito para os camponeses hoje: a busca pela terra, terra que corre leite e mel*)."[44] Land loss and the quest for

land ownership are thus highly contemporary issues for ordinary readers living in economically underdeveloped countries.

Third, economic asynchrony also relates to a country's industrial developments and the social conditions they produce. Often, they relate to unjust and delayed salary payments and the lack of worker's rights. Nowadays, most impoverished countries are industrialized. Thousands of former peasants work in factories producing commodities for export to Europe and North America. Often these factory workers labor under hazardous safety and working conditions that characterized European and American factories during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries prior to the legalization of worker's rights and a unionized labor force. Yet factory workers in China, Bangladesh, the Philippines, and other impoverished countries do not have the protection of unions and thus lack fundamental worker's rights even today. One of the most important worker's rights relates to getting one's wages paid on time. Biblical texts address the problem of wage delays and wage theft, indicating that the on-time payment of wages was a problem then. For instance, a law in Deuteronomy commands: "You shall not withhold the wages of poor and needy laborers, whether other Israelites or aliens who reside in your land in one of your towns. You shall pay them their wages daily before sunset, because they are poor and their livelihood depends on them" (Deut. 24:14–15, NRSV). The prophet Malachi mentions that the law was not followed. He announces judgment against those "who oppress the hired workers in their wages" (Mal. 3:5, NRSV). The problem has not changed much today.

Fourth, another serious problem of today's global asynchrony in the economic realm pertains to the dramatic increase of global migration. The reasons for people leaving their native countries are often the same as in biblical times. They relate to wars and violence, economic distress, or the lack of a viable economic future. Consequently, migrants live in forced or voluntary exiles. Their experiences are useful to those who have not been forced to move to other countries on a permanent basis. Justo L. González explains: "In exile, one leaves what has been the center of one's life and moves to the periphery. … No matter what the reason the land that our eyes first saw can no longer sustain the life of peace and joy that God intends. As we look back to those lands, many of us can say with the prophet: We get our bread at the peril of our lives because of the sword in the wilderness. Our skin is black as an oven."[45] Migration is thus a huge issue in our time, too.

Fifth, another phenomenon common to biblical texts and asynchronously organized contemporary societies relates to the issue of family structures

destroyed by poverty and economic injustice. Poverty forces many Southern Asian people to migrate and search for jobs in other countries where they often work under slave-like conditions. In the process, families are separated. Another factor in the dissolution of families is the problem of men fathering children and then leaving them. In poor neighborhoods around the globe, millions of women raise their children who were conceived with different fathers. The situation is similar to situations found in the Bible. Women live in homes without their disappeared husbands (Mic. 2:9). The book of Micah articulates the total destruction of neighborhood, friendship, and family relations in this way: “Put no trust in a friend, have no confidence in a loved one; guard the doors of your mouth from her who lies in your embrace; for the son treats the father with contempt, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; your enemies are members of your own household” (Mic.`7:5–6, NRSV). The passage is quoted again in Mt. 10:35–36 and Lk. 12:53 and thus demonstrates that asynchronic economies produce failing family structures in both biblical and contemporary times.

Sixth and finally, extreme forms of poverty characterize many biblical narratives and today’s asynchronically structured societies. Increasingly, poverty also permeates societies of the global centers, which perhaps indicates that globalization is striking back at societies previously exempt from economic devastation. Yet compared to poverty in asynchronically organized economies, the situation of poor people is relatively better within the global centers. Thus, the following biblical text depicts the situation of poor people in the South more than in so-called developed countries. The passage of Job 24 describes the situation of people who have nothing left to live for. They are absolutely impoverished, and they represent what the nineteenth-century economic philosopher Karl Marx called the “Lumpenproletariat.” These are people forced to live like beggars and thieves. Job 24 states: “[T]he poor of the earth all hide themselves. Like wild asses in the desert they go out to their toil, scavenging in the waste-land food for their young. They reap in a field not their own and they glean in the vineyard of the wicked. They lie all night naked, without clothing, and have no covering in the cold. They are wet with the rain of the mountains, and cling to the rock for want of shelter” (Job 24:4–8, NRSV). The garbage dumps all over the globalized world are filled with people forced to live under these kinds of devastating conditions of total poverty.

In sum, the existence of debt-slavery, the problem of land loss, the delayed payment of wages and the lack of worker’s rights, migration, the destruction of family structures, and the prevalence of absolutely impoverished people

illustrate the similarity between the Bible and today's asynchronically organized countries. As a result, ordinary readers from these societies have direct and immediate understanding of many biblical texts that readers from economically highly developed societies find almost incomprehensible. Since globalization ensures that not all people on the globe live under the same conditions even though they share the same time period, their economic status is asynchronous. Today's people who live much more closely to people of biblical times thus understand the Bible without complicated interpretive assistance. Their living conditions resemble closely the conditions of people from the biblical time periods. Thus, the first insight is that readers, living in economies of a low-level development, understand biblical texts without additional explanations, in contrast to readers from fully developed economies who need so much help in comprehending biblical texts. Global asynchrony leads to different local hermeneutical abilities.

Second Insight: Biblical Texts Unveil Reality Even Today

Closely linked to the phenomenon of global asynchrony is the fact that the reality of violence, oppression, and exploitation appears in a much more direct manner in biblical texts than in the complicated structures of highly developed contemporary societies. This fact often allows readers from below direct access to the meaning of biblical texts without any hermeneutical detour. I personally witnessed an incidence of direct access to biblical meaning when I visited Chile in 1989. One day I visited a particularly economically poor neighborhood. Young people handed out a handmade newspaper that had been produced by Catholic, socialist, and communist youth groups. In the midst of articles on social, economic, and political issues, I found a text entitled "Christian Reflection." It featured a Spanish translation of Isa. 10:1–4 that the newspaper published with the title, "Those Who Organize Oppression." I translated the Spanish title and the following quote from the article into English:

> Woe to those who decree iniquitous decrees and with their decrees organize oppression, who rob the poor of my people of their right and turn aside the needy from justice, who leave the widow without anything and make the orphans their prey. What will they do on the day of punishment, in the calamity that will come from far away? To whom will they flee for help? Where will they leave their wealth? Nothing remains but to crouch among the prisoners or to fall among the slain. And Yahweh's anger is not turned away, and Yahweh's hand is stretched out still.

The article presented only the translation of Isa. 10:1–4. It did not feature any commentary or any hermeneutical effort to explain the biblical text. To the Chilean victims of globalization in 1989, the biblical poem from the eighth-century BCE was self-evident because it depicted exactly the people's situation. The text itself was enough for its readers to understand its meaning without any additional commentary or explanation.

The Brazilian women with whom Susann Schüepp reads the Bible also reported that under their conditions, who the oppressors are becomes evident to them—big landowners owning large estates. Peasants who occupy small parts of the estate are killed or driven away. Farmers who own small plots of land often lose their land by the violent actions of the powerful who construct industrial plants or installations for tourist use on the land. Under these circumstances, readers from the margins directly understand what the promise of the Exodus story is. It is the promise of land to readers from below.[46] Bible readers in the West who do not directly confront such dire situations, and often even benefit from them as consumers or tourists, get access to the economic meaning of the biblical texts only when they read interpretations from below.

Yet in the global asynchrony of our times, situations are not always as transparent as in the Chilean or Brazilian examples. Modern land-grabbing is mostly operated by foreign countries or corporations. It is thus quite different from situations in biblical times. In the Bible peasants who lose their fields and houses know the people who take them away from them. They live in the same village or in nearby towns. Biblical texts tell many stories about rich and poor, oppressor and oppressed, exploiter and exploited who knew each other directly. For instance, the book of Proverbs mentions: "The rich and the poor meet together; Yhwh is the maker of them all" (Prov. 22:2). Legislation reckons with the possibility of slave-owners striking their male or female slaves so that they die (Exod. 21:20) or loose an eye or tooth (Exod. 21:26–27). The prophet Jeremiah compares those who "have become great and rich" with "fowlers who set a trap; they catch human beings" (Jer. 5:26–27, NRSV).

Even in the world of global asynchrony direct contact as described in the Bible still occurs today. Yet, usually, anonymity is the rule. Those who suffer from exploitation and oppression do not know the names of their exploiters and oppressors. They are confronted by agents who only do what they are told to do. These agents do not profit from the exploitation and oppression, as they themselves are often exploited. Those who are responsible profit from the system, but they remain anonymous and unknown.

The "old-fashioned" biblical texts with their direct contact between those on

the top and those from below hint at the fact that in today's anonymous circumstances, some people benefit and others suffer from the system. Nowadays, who is who is less obvious. People living in Western Europe and North America have countless opportunities to stay uninformed. The exploitation of humans and the destruction of nature occur in mostly hidden ways. The reading of biblical texts from a pre-modern world forces contemporary readers in developed countries to ask about the real costs that enable a high standard of living. They will learn that individual people benefit from structures of oppression and not from societies as a whole. Perhaps they also discover that they are the ones benefiting from the current economic disparities implemented by neoliberal ideology.

Contemporary critics often accuse biblical prophets of exaggeration and bias. This strategy is not false. The prophets of the Hebrew Bible do not speak as sociologists or statisticians according to whom an economy is not "healthy"[47] when people are exploited. In biblical times, too, some people thought they had nothing to do with exploitation and oppression. According to the prophet Hosea, his Ephraimite contemporaries exclaimed: "Ah, I am rich, I have gained wealth for myself; in all of my gain no offence has been found in me that would be sin" (Hos. 12:8, NRSV; Hebr. 12:9). Hosea accuses them of being traitors in whose hands are false balances; they are people who "love to oppress" (v. 7; in Hebrew: v. 8). The prophet Micah is confronted with people who tell him: "Do not preach … one should not preach of such things; disgrace will not overtake us" (Mic. 2:6, NRSV). They have no conscience of being guilty. Micah condemns them of coveting fields, seizing houses, and taking the oppressed away when the prophet observes: "They oppress householder and house, people and their inheritance" (Mic. 2:2). Instead of accusing the prophets of being "curmudgeons,"[48] we should be grateful that their radical utterances enable us to detect deeper realities behind the superficial rhetoric of building a "healthy" economy.

Third Insight: Women Are Always the First Victims within Structures of Domination

The third insight that characterizes the reading of the Bible from below and that is suspicious of neoliberal justifications by academic Bible readers who live in fully developed economies focuses on women as the victims of structures of domination. Women's situations within contemporary conditions of globalization

resemble the situation of biblical women, especially prostitution and slavery.

First, even today young girls who live in poverty are often forced to prostitute themselves. Sometimes they are sold into slavery or given away into wealthy households of their home countries although often they are sent into households abroad. Once there, they are not only exploited as household workers but also abused sexually. This dire situation is already mentioned in a biblical law. The passage in Exod. 21:7–11 begins with the following words: "When a man sells his daughter as a slave. …" In this case the father is not able to pay his debt and is forced to sell a family member, his own daughter. The girl is placed into a foreign family where she not only works but is also sexually abused. The biblical law regulates this situation and tries to protect the girl. It stipulates that she must be married like a free wife who cannot be sent away if she displeases her master.[49] Yet the accusations in Amos 2:7 critique that the law is not always applied. The prophet thus denounces that "father and son go in to the same girl." The verb "to go in" refers to sexual intercourse.[50] In my reading from below, the situation of the young woman resembles the enslaved girls of Exod. 21:7–11. She is enslaved in a family but instead of being married to either father or son, she is instead sexually violated by the male members of the master's family. The contemporary female household worker who pays for her family's debt reminds me of these biblical passages. Reading them from below gives the contemporary situations the name they deserve: they are about slavery.

The contemporary situation for impoverished young women is indeed grave. The Global Slavery Index, an annual study of world-wide slavery conditions published by the Australian Walk Free Foundation indicates how slavery functions in the today's world. The study estimates that 45.8 million people were enslaved in 2016. One reason for their enslavement is debt. When a highly indebted father of a family dies, creditors often take the family's children away to have them work off the father's debt. Widows and their children—the classical "widows and orphans"—are still the weakest members in many societies, as they were in biblical times according to many biblical texts, such as Exod. 22:22, Deut. 14:29, Isa. 1:23, Jer. 7:6, and Mal. 3:5. Reports about contemporary causes for turning fatherless children into debt slaves shed light on many biblical stories, such as the already mentioned narrative in 2 Kgs. 4:1–7. As long as the father is alive, creditors do not bother the family. After the death of the father, however, the creditor shows up and takes away both children. It is impossible to imagine that the action of the creditor in 2 Kgs. 4:1–7 could be understood as "a charitable act out of which neither party made a fortune," as Guillaume contends in his reading.[51] Only followers of a neoliberal economic

logic that classifies economic exploitation as “healthy”[52] come up with such a callous and ruthless reading.

Another biblical text illustrates the devastating consequences for women and their children when their male provider perishes. The passage in Micah 2 describes how the male head of a family encounters economic oppression. Verses 1–2 mention that the “devisers of wickedness and plotters of evil” do “violence to a man and his house, a man and his inheritance.”[53] As a result, the man loses his worldly possession and disappears. Several verses later the woman and her children are driven away. The text is written as an accusation, stating: “You have driven out the women of my people from their pleasant houses. You have taken away from their children my glory forever (Mic. 2:9).”[54] Contemporary situations help us to comprehend what happens to the women. They live under poorest conditions and lack a male breadwinner in a kyriarchal economic setting. The biblical text indicates the different fate for women and men. A man loses his possession and then leaves his family. A woman stays behind and continues to be responsible for her children. Women are thus economic victims in two ways: first, they lose their land when the family’s male provider disappears; second, they care for their children but lose their home and the freedom of their children. The claim that women are always the first victims in situations of economic precarity in the Bible and today demonstrates that biblical texts and the contemporary globalized economic order illuminate each other, if we read the Bible from below.

The Ongoing Challenges of Reading from Below: Concluding Comments

This essay argues that all of us benefit from biblical readings from below because they illustrate the similarities between today’s economically marginalized Bible readers and the situations described in the Bible. The similarity explains why economically marginalized Bible readers find it so easy to read biblical texts in a direct, immediate, and unencumbered way, without requiring complicated hermeneutical maneuvers. Readers from Europe and North America can thus learn from ordinary readers living in the southern hemisphere, but neoliberal assumptions and convictions make it difficult for European and North American readers to be open-minded and appreciative listeners to exegetical positions from below.

As a European scholar in a traditional academic institution, I would like to end my analysis with a warning directed to myself. Reading from below must be informed by the experiences of people from below. I must be careful not to project my own ideas onto them. African scholar Justin Ukpong (1940–2011) reports on a popular reading process in Nigeria. Ukpong compares the Nigerian reading with a control group from Glasgow. He describes that the Scottish readers' "motives for reading the bible were meant as guidance, support and solace." For him, Scottish readers offer traditional ideas about reading the Bible. Ukpong observes that, in contrast to the European readers, African readers are primarily interested in establishing how the Bible could protect them against the power of evil spirits. He addresses the African readerly concerns when he states: "That the majority of the research population were interested in and were even preoccupied with spiritual protection against evil forces in their use of the bible strongly betrays the influence of their culture because these are the main preoccupations of the African Traditional Religions."[55]

I add to Ukpong's description that neither the Scottish nor the Nigerian readers were interested in questions about the economy and the social situations in biblical texts. We must not have a romanticized or idealized notion of ordinary readers from below. We must not expect them to read what we want them to read. We should listen to them even if they speak of evil spirits and not of social and economic problems. And we should try to understand what they mean by it, even if it is not easy for European or North-American academic scholars.

In spite of this warning, I think that we can learn a lot from ordinary readers. My impression is that we only are at the very beginning of understanding the importance of readings from below and of listening to ordinary Bible readers who come from economic situations that are considerably more similar to the biblical world than the neoliberal economic structures so prevalent in European and North American societies. When we read the Bible from below, we have a much better chance to not reinforce intellectually, exegetically, and theologically globalized economic structures of exploitation, oppression, and sources of injustice to the vast majority of people in our world.

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CHAPTER 9

TOWARD AN AFRICAN FEMINIST ETHICS AND THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

FUNLỌLA O. ỌLỌJẸDE

THIS essay argues that a feminist African ethics must be based on different principles than Western Socratic-Aristotelian ethics. Similar to Woman Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9, the former centers on the traditional African communitarian notions of care and empathy. The latter resembles the Strange Woman in Proverbs 1–9. Like her, a Western ethics invites Africans to join the West, but it is dangerous to respond to the invitation. Both ethical paradigms exist in the book of Proverbs and in contemporary post-independent and postcolonial Africa. Native wisdom and foreign wisdom appear side by side in daily African life in a hybrid fashion. Their proximity and simultaneous presence foster the illusion of a unified ethics, but it is an antithetical and even counter-ethical system, feeding folly or strangeness within its practitioners. Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman thus illustrate two systems of African ethics. One is moral and local whereas the other is immoral and foreign. Since both of them operate in tandem in the African context, the current ethical paradigm blends in strange ways. It is an amalgam of elements that are strange to an African feminist ethics.

The book of Proverbs represents a helpful biblical text to explore the intersection of ethics, wisdom, and feminism in the African context. As a didactic book, Proverbs contains a deeply embedded sapiential ethics with well-known female characters. They make Proverbs a treasure trove for feminist Old Testament scholars.[1] African feminist exegetes have also studied this biblical book. For instance, Madipoane Masenya (ngwana' Mphahlele) presents an African woman's interpretation of Proverbs 31 with her creatively developed and contextualized *bosadi* hermeneutics.[2] My own work engages Proverbs within the African context, arguing for a gender-sensitive and gender-balanced reading

focused on both positive and negative characterizations of both women and men.[3] In short, the book of Proverbs provides important biblical images and topics for the development of a feminist African ethics grounded in the Bible.

Yet African theologians, ethicists, and exegetes have largely ignored the link between biblical ethics and feminism. I examined previously the dearth of scholarship on the ethics in Proverbs, not to mention feminist research on the ethical vision of this biblical book.[4] The scholarly silence is even worse in African biblical hermeneutics where a general apathy toward sapiential texts predominates. Neither feminist nor African nor feminist African exegetes examine the competing ethical paradigms, as they emerge in Proverbs in general and in the depiction of Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman in chapters 1–9.

This essay fills the gap not only for African biblical hermeneutics but also for the development of a sapiential ethics in general. Discussing the speeches of Woman Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9 as a point of departure, the essay argues that social location and experiences of African women ought to be central for an African feminist ethics. After an outline of the speeches made by Woman Wisdom, the essay suggests that various elements in those speeches resonate with several African ethical values if they are read with a feminist lens. Pivotal is the communitarian character of traditional African ethics, marked by care and empathy. Finally, the essay juxtaposes Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman to illustrate the fusion of traditional and foreign ethical concepts in contemporary African ethical discourse. A feminist African ethics must recognize the tension inherent in the post-independent and postcolonial African context and develop ethical principles different from the Western Socratic-Aristotelian ethics.

Toward the Development of an African Feminist Ethics

The articulation of an African feminist ethics is a complicated task. While it must take its cues from African ethics, it also has to prioritize the concerns of African women. It rejects hegemonic ethical ideas sometimes prevalent in African ethics that ignore or even deny the autonomy and dignity of African women. At the same time, an African feminist ethics shares some concerns with feminist ethical systems developed in other geopolitical contexts, but its focus is always on *African* women. On the conceptual level, two important elements

characterize a specifically African feminist ethics. They pertain to the considerations of social location and the experiences of African women.

First, an African feminist ethics ought to stress the significance of social location. Feminist scholars from the global South observe that usually Western feminist ethical proposals ignore matters of social location as a concern. They also ignore issues of class and race in their analyses. African feminist ethicists therefore criticize this tendency in Western feminist ethics. For instance, Oyèrónké Oyewùmí states: "Women are not just women; factors of race, class, regional origins, age, and kinship ties are central to the understanding of inter-gender and intro-gender relations, locally and globally."[5] Similarly, African feminists contend that feminism is generally ethnocentric and regularly U.S.-American and Eurocentric. Western feminism greatly misrepresents and stereotypes Africa and African women, and it even has a "tendency to baseless generalizations," as the African scholar, Olufẹmi Taiwo, bluntly argues in respect of scholarship in general.[6] Consequently, African feminists want to articulate a distinct endogenous African feminism.[7] As Oyewùmí explains: "Feminism, without a doubt, elucidates the European worldview and the socio-political organizations and processes that flow from it."[8] We need to develop our own contextualized African feminist ethics that is grounded in endogenous African realities, experiences, and contexts.

Importantly, feminist biblical scholars have conveyed the significance of one's social location. Accordingly, feminist exegetes read biblical texts from different perspectives because they recognize that different feminist readers are located in diverse socio-political and geographical settings. For instance, African American women read biblical texts differently from Latin American women.[9] In line with the hermeneutical insight that social location matters, some African feminist exegetes thus advocate for postcolonial feminist interpretations of the Bible in challenge to dominant androcentric and European-American colonizing ways of reading.[10] In general, African Bible scholars, whether they are feminist or not, consider social location a central factor for biblical exegesis. They know that a postcolonial context produces a different biblical interpretation from an imperial or colonial setting. In short, social location matters greatly to an African feminist ethics of the Bible.

A point of clarification is needed. The notion of social location is not necessarily synonymous with geographical or geopolitical location. An African feminist living in the United States can still read the Bible from an African perspective. Her reading does not necessarily advance a U.S.-American perspective if she identifies as an African citizen and with the African context.

Many Africans live and work abroad, but their diasporic life does not necessarily give them a perspective other than an African perspective, as long as African and not diasporic norms inform their biblical readings. The same might be the case for U.S.-American or European readers who live outside of their native social locations. The original contexts of diasporic readers can thus still profoundly impact biblical interpretations and ethical considerations of African readers living abroad.

Second, an African feminist ethics ought to focus on African women's experiences. Feminist ethicists from other continents affirm the significance of this principle. For instance, Carol S. Robb states that "feminist ethical theory, in general terms, presupposes a criticism of the forces which limit women's autonomy in the ethical realm,"[11] and so it marks women's experiences as primary for feminist ethical explorations. Women's experiences, however, are widely divergent and different. African American ethicist Katie G. Cannon stresses this point when she asserts that "the intersection of race, sex, and class gives womanist scholars a different ethical orientation with a different ideological perspective"[12] than white U.S.-American feminists. Cannon also observes that, unfortunately, white feminist ethical discussions rarely refer to the experiences of women of color. Thus, she proposes that "Black women's moral agency must be understood on their own terms rather than being judged by essentially abstract external ideological norms and squeezed into categories and systems which consider white men the measure of significance."[13]

African feminist ethicists make similar assertions. Like women of color in the United States, they find that European-American positions limit their scholarly work. In other words, European-American feminist ethics do not adequately describe African women's experiences. Yet African feminist women's situation also differs from African American women because African feminists also share similar struggles as white women. Both black African and white women face gender discrimination from the men in their societies. For instance, they are paid less, they have fewer job opportunities, they lack equal promotion opportunities in the labor market, and they have more domestic responsibilities than the men in their families due to the relentless persistence of patriarchal traditions and habits in society. In many African countries, women are still the main care takers of children despite that they hold full time jobs like their male partners. African feminist ethicists need to probe the ongoing gender imbalance in the family and in society. Far too often tradition remains unquestioned because men still dominate the public spheres in society.

In short, the two principles of social location and African women's

experiences ensure that an African feminist ethics will benefit African women today and reduce ongoing misogynist societal and religious structures in Africa. The sapiential tradition of Wisdom Woman and the Strange Woman provides important rhetorical resources to reflect on the substance and direction of an African feminist ethics for today's African women.

Listening to Woman Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9

Three important speeches of Woman Wisdom are salient to an African feminist stance. The speeches appear in Proverbs 1, 8, and 9, depicting Woman Wisdom as a preacher of righteousness. She exhibits ethical values, such as moral integrity, honesty, prudence, and uprightness. She is also generous when she invites other people, especially young men, asking them to emulate her virtues. The positive image of this female character is reinforced in the depiction of another female character, the so-called good wife in Prov. 31:10–31. Wisdom Woman is, however, also contrasted with a rival female figure, the Strange or Foreign Woman (*'iššah zarah*) in Prov. 2:16, 5:3.20, and 7:5. Both female characters are wealthy and enjoy considerable influence. They are upper-class figures (7:16–20; 9:1–6), persuading others, especially young men (7:11–12.21; 9:3.14–15), and rendering hospitality (9:2.5.17). They also speak and act in the public realm (7:8.12; 8:13; 9:3.14–15). Both of them invite naïve men to turn to them (7:18; 8:4–5; 9:4–5.14–15).

Despite their similarities, both female figures are also significantly different in their words, actions, and goals. For instance, Woman Wisdom "is a preacher of righteousness who is interested in maintaining order in the community and promoting responsible citizenship."[14] In contrast, the Strange Woman is immoral and a bold-faced adulteress and seducer of young men on the righteous path. Some biblical exegetes assert that the literal depiction of the Strange Woman as an adulterer should be understood metaphorically. She is regarded as a woman of foreign nationality who is a social outsider, perhaps even a prostitute, promoting foreign worship and practices or a foreign goddess such as Ishtar.[15] The biblical interpreter, Johann Cook, adheres to this reading of the Strange Woman in Proverbs. In his view, the Strange Woman "can be only one foreign dangerous wisdom, namely, Greek philosophy of the kind encountered in the Hellenistic period."[16] Accordingly, Cook views the Strange Woman as a metaphoric

reference to wisdom that is foreign to the people living in the Yehud.

Interestingly, scholars do not usually refer to Woman Wisdom in metaphorical ways. The three poems in 1:20–31, 8:1–36, and 9:1–6 describe the female figure as a peripatetic preacher in search of students. She walks in the streets, lectures in the public square and at the entrance of the city gate, on the hilltop, and at the crossroad where she speaks loudly to draw the attention of especially young, naïve, or foolish men (1:22; 8:4–5). She asks them to embrace wisdom and understanding (1:22; 8:1.5). In the first poem she seems desperate, frustrated, and perhaps even perplexed that some listeners choose folly and naïveté and not wisdom and knowledge. In the second poem she explains why her audience should listen to her. Her credentials are impeccable. She speaks clearly, is wise, and is of unquestionable character (8:6–9.20). She is wealthy and is generous to whoever chooses to embrace her wisdom, knowledge, counsel, discretion, and prudence (8:18.21). In the third poem she seems to have changed because her persona is different (9:1–6). She is well-established in her house and she enjoys the services of many maids. She is a wealthy woman who has the money to invite many guests to fancy dinners. Woman Wisdom does not go out anymore but sends her maids to bring people to her estate. Her call to embrace wisdom is backed by the dinner invitation. Her tone is more conciliatory than in the previous two speeches, as she extends friendly invitations. Her scathing words have disappeared.

To biblical exegete, Daniel J. Estes, the poetry about Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman is metaphoric speech. It represents "sets of abstractions [that] constitute rival ethical systems that compete for the allegiance not just of the young, but of all humans."[17] In his view, "Woman Wisdom incarnates the ethical path of wisdom that is set against the path of folly pictured by the Strange Woman."[18] Both paths of wisdom and of folly correspond to righteousness and evil or wickedness. They represent what Estes classifies as "contrasting ethical paradigms."[19] The ethics of Woman Wisdom is grounded in the fear of God whereas the behavior of the Strange Woman shuns God. Estes thus asserts that "Prov 1–9 is not just a tale of two women" but "a tale of two ethical systems which are pictured by the Strange Woman and Woman Wisdom."[20] The choice is ours, but it is not difficult to make because the Strange Woman prefers "autonomy that rejects Yahweh as the ethical basis for life" and it is this rejection "that makes the Strange Woman strange."[21] What then is the significance of Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman for an African feminist ethics?

The Communitarian Outlook of Woman Wisdom as a Foundation for an Endogenous African Ethics

The significance of the female characters in Proverbs 1–9 for an African feminist ethics is not difficult to convey. The speeches of Woman Wisdom focus on communitarian values as central elements of the ethics articulated in the book of Proverbs. Woman Wisdom embodies the ethical ideals, values, and principles that characterize the communitarian concerns of the endogenous African ethics. Such an ethics cares for vulnerable members in society, and it upholds the virtues of honesty, integrity, probity, sexual morality, and good neighborliness. Foremost, such an ethics promotes the common good. Thus, the ethics of Woman Wisdom does not only correlate to contemporary African sensibilities, but it also provides the foundation for developing an endogenous African ethics with feminist concerns in mind.[22]

Woman Wisdom is central in this ethics. Her speeches depict a strong woman who has a powerful voice. She is an independent campaigner who walks in the streets and talks with people. She exhibits clear leadership qualities not only in the public but also at home where she commands a retinue of maids. She plans well-organized gala dinners with a huge number of guests. She is a strong, capable, and disciplined woman of impeccable integrity and considerable wisdom. An African feminist ethics needs to emphasize this woman's abilities, especially in sharp contrast to the many male African politicians who take advantage of the African peoples. They walk in the streets, make all kinds of promises, and then after they are elected into office betray everyone. They are full of falsehood and deceit, failing to deliver on their election promises; they lack integrity and honor. Thus they are the opposite of Woman Wisdom and do not adhere to the communitarian values that an endogenous African ethics propagates. An African feminist ethics rejects the values of the current generation of African politicians and instead stresses the alternative ethical values as Woman Wisdom embodies them. Her example should mold the leadership qualities for African politicians. They would then advance the welfare of the community, reject individual selfishness, and refuse to enrich themselves and their families with public funds. The depiction of Woman Wisdom should be the prototype for anybody seeking to hold public office in African countries, especially those nations that appear on the bottom of the Corruption Perceptions

Index (CPI).[23]

Importantly, Woman Wisdom does not only advocate honesty, integrity, wisdom, and counsel, but she also shares her material resources (8:18.21). Her repeated sharing communicates the communitarian ideals that an African feminist ethics seeks to encourage. Woman Wisdom invites many people to come to her dinner parties and to enjoy the exquisite food delicacies (9:1–6). She is a community-oriented person who seeks to enhance the common good in her society. She cares and has empathy for those who lack resources (9:4). She is attentive to those who are poor and exist in abject living conditions. She cares enough to act. This female figure thus illustrates the values of an endogenous African ethics. It must contain calls for care and empathy although these qualities are heavily gendered in African patriarchal society and some feminists have thus questioned them.[24] Yet in the daily presence of undeniable poverty, hunger, and human degradation, an African feminist ethics finds it easy to identify with Woman Wisdom's invitation to share wealth, food, and personal resources. Woman Wisdom's calling of the poor and the street hooligans to the banquet table illustrates communitarian values rooted in acts of care and empathy toward the poor and oppressed, many of whom are women and girls.

The Strange Woman as a Reflection of the Western Foreign Ethics in Africa

In contrast, the figure of the Strange Woman expresses the foreignness of much in African contemporary society. She is a character from the outside and foreign, perhaps because of ethnic, familial, religious, marital, or moral differences.[25] Her actions are portrayed as morally inferior. They also have negative outcomes for those who succumb to her seductive speech. She is the opposite of Woman Wisdom and her words are not like the wisdom teacher whom people should follow.[26] Perhaps the juxtaposition of Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman are part of a deliberate strategy to underline the divergent ethical visions articulated in the book of Proverbs. One of the women is the epitome of wisdom whereas the other woman is the epitome of folly and sexual impropriety. Both stand side by side, and strange wisdom operates next to divinely approved wisdom. One ethical system is local and the other ethical system is foreign. Both of them represent two antithetical ethical ways of life in Africa.

According to Olufemi Taiwo, African issues and African peoples have been

misrepresented in European and North American scholarship, media, and politics.[27] Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí confirms that the Western culture of misrepresentation devalues African experiences "and leads to the silencing of African voices in the articulation of their own experiences."[28] In light of this powerful observation, one might conclude that hardly anything is traditional anymore in traditional African ethics. According to many researchers, the traditional African ethics ought to be centered on *ubuntu* or *botho*, a concept at the core of our humanness. *Ubuntu* or *botho* is, in fact, what makes us human. Yet like with most African issues during the past five centuries, the traditional African ethics contains many aspects of patriarchal, imperialist, colonial, and modern ideologies. In addition, globalization, free market trade, urbanization, neoliberalism, racism, and neo-colonialism, as well as other subterranean forces have stripped the traditional African ethics of the last vestiges of its indigeneity and autonomy. Nowadays, an eclectic mix of ethical values on the African scene is difficult to deny. Any effort to develop a coherent theory of African ethics, an ethics of African biblical hermeneutics, or even an African feminist ethics, must take account of this fusion.

Do the women figures in Proverbs thus not reflect the ongoing tensions in African post-independent and postcolonial ethical paradigms today? The Western Socratic-Aristotelian model of ethics dictates the rules of hermeneutics, including in biblical interpretation. The Western conception of ethics prioritizes the individual and personal autonomy over against the communitarian way of life. It insists on René Descartes' dictum of *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am). It is a "strange" model of ethics in the context of an endogenously developed African ethical paradigm. The latter promotes communitarianism, care, and empathy. It proclaims: "I am because we are."[29] An African ethics considers communitarian or relational values and principles of the people despite the fact that no single unified "African ethic" exists. Yet there are "many commonalities and points of agreement with regard to 'ethnic morality'—that is, traditional African ethics."[30] It resembles the ethical system represented by Woman Wisdom, superseding the unethical system represented by the Strange Woman. Yet in post-independent and postcolonial Africa, the endogenous ethics has given way to the foreign ethics. Or perhaps the endogenous ethics is subsumed by the foreign. As a result, contemporary African life has merged both ethical models into a confused blending of both. The book of Proverbs suggests that both models, represented by Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman, operate in tandem, leaving behind the familiar ethics of Woman Wisdom.

This interpretation of the Strange Woman as a reflection of the Western

Socratic-Aristotelian ethics as strange or foreign in the African context should, however, not be misunderstood to mean that Western ethics as a strange ethics is foolish or immoral. The interpretation suggests merely that within the African context, the familiar, endogenous, and communitarian ethical approach to life stands in tension to the foreign, individual, and Western ethics. The tension poses serious challenges for the development of an African feminist ethics today because at stake is the ethical coherence, allegiances, and recommendations for people living in African lands. The book of Proverbs in general and the two female figures of Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman offer an intriguing opportunity to reflect on the post-independent and postcolonial African context.

Shall we follow communitarian values of care and empathy more strictly than African people currently do? Diversity, hybridity, and many cultural and political choices characterize African societies. How shall an African feminist ethics, grounded in biblical readings, direct contemporary African people who seek guidance and advice? What is increasingly obvious is the fact that an African feminist ethics is a strange bedfellow with Western feminist ethics. The former must identify ethical guidelines that address its particular social location and be centered on the experiences of African women, but how to get there remains challenging. The paradox that marks African ethics has to do with the liminality, the hybridity, the tension, and the dilution that is now inherent in its expression. It is similar to the two contrasting female figures in Proverbs. Native wisdom and foreign wisdom appear daily in hybrid ways. Correspondingly, the contemporary African ethical system is founded both on wisdom and on folly or strangeness. In the world of Proverbs, daily life means living with that tension, and with the awareness of the proximity of both the wise and the strange, the ethical and the unethical.

Communitarian Values, Care, and Empathy in African Feminist Ethical Deliberations: Toward a Conclusion

The development of an African feminist ethics is not a simple task in light of the complex histories and traditions of the African continent with its many people. One insight seems, however, certain. An African feminist ethics can find valuable resources in the book of Proverbs to articulate the complexities of African women and people. We have to recognize that the project of an African

ethics cannot become an autonomous or "original" project because a strange Western ethical program, based on foreign paradigms and values, has influenced African thought for centuries. The study of Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman, however, also suggests that communitarian values of care and empathy ought to define an African feminist ethics. Ours is not an individualistic and autonomous identity but it is connected to our fellow humans. An African feminist ethics thus needs to consider the specifics of the various social locations in which such an ethics speaks, and it must center on the experiences of African women. Our experiences are different from Western women and thus an African feminist ethics cannot generalize about women as if the particularities of African women's experiences did not matter. In this sense, then, this essay maintains that Woman Wisdom and her communitarian values ought to be the foundation for the development of an African feminist ethics. The integration of biblical ethics into African feminism holds much promise in the ongoing efforts to articulate African feminist ethical convictions for our continent.

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CHAPTER 10

LAMENT AS WOMANIST HEALING IN TIMES OF GLOBAL VIOLENCE

CHERYL A. KIRK-DUGGAN

SCANDALOUS, heinous sexual and domestic violence crimes in the Bible signify and glorify twenty-first-century violent crimes against humanity. That violence against women is a catastrophic, epidemic, global travesty surfaces in the Canadian National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The inquiry indicates widespread disappearance and murder of over 1,200 dead and missing Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual people—a portrait of ubiquitous, violent racist and sexist stereotypes, and state-sanctioned neglect, between 1980 and 2012.[1] Globally, millions of women and girls daily experience violence or live with its consequences.[2] Scholars/activists and people of faith need a response.

Womanist activist/scholars and others committed to liberation, call for social justice, as global, domestic, sexual, and terroristic violence mount daily. Bombings of temples, churches, mosques, or synagogues and school shootings occur too frequently. Policy and protest seem ineffective. Many gun lobbyists value the right to bear arms over creating regulations making it more difficult for unstable persons to purchase weapons, underground markets notwithstanding. Such violence and internalized, unprocessed grief causing premature deaths, signal a need for lament. Globally, too many people hurt in silence causing intergenerational dysfunction. Too many faith traditions are often oblivious; too many police officers see city streets as combat zones and live with undiagnosed

PTSD. The earth groans from the weight of grief, anger, and loss. Lament can produce avenues of awareness, witness, hope, and healing.

Lament, a language that passionately expresses grief or sorrow, can help one face major and minor traumas of loss and grief within human life. Global, horrific, heinous acts of violence, anchored in fear-driven venom reveals a need for preventative measures; such dissonance and pain requires lament. Of the 150 Psalms, the majority are laments, tales of woe, and hymns of horror, where battered, broken souls cry out for relief.[3] Lament questions divine justice and God's activity with God's creatures. Given global, individual, and personal loss ranging from rape as an act of war to persecution and displacement of immigrants and refugees, lament is a tool of grief management, family and private devotion, and pastoral care—critical when dealing with death of a loved one, job/home loss, bad divorce, and loss of self. The book of Lamentations—five poems of communal and individual mourning—also signifies and celebrates the need to engage loss and grief. Significant experiences of women in Judges 11 and 19 are so horrible that they demand lament.

This essay explores lament as response to pain and suffering generated by sexual and domestic violence against self and ultimately community, from a global womanist perspective. After providing a brief overview of my womanist biblical hermeneutic, this essay: (1) explores lament as response to violent patriarchal misogyny in the lives of two unnamed biblical women in concert with global domestic violence; (2) explores lament embodied in a selected Psalm, Lamentations, and a lament by Beyoncé; and (3) concludes by invoking lament as a way to process the immediacy of daily loss and grief, globally.

Embodied Womanist Biblical Hermeneutics

Womanist theory invites and insists that one live in the present, study history, and engage in radical listening, to see, know, challenge, analyze, and make a difference. This epistemic, interdisciplinary field of study: takes seriously the analysis and transformation of societal and personal injustices that affect those who usually matter least in society, as symbolized by poor African diasporan women; explores living, written, oral, visual, aural, sensual, and artistic texts to create an intellectual, spiritual dialog to prepare individuals to experience life holistically. Womanist, derived by Alice Walker[4] from the term "womanish," refers to women of African descent who are audacious, outrageous, in charge, and responsible. A Womanist emancipatory theory embraces freedom, and

honors the *imago Dei*, essential goodness in all persons.

Conceptually, womanist theory[5] names, questions, interprets, and helps transform the oppression of women, particularly those affected by race, gender, sexual orientation, ability, age, and class domination. Womanists engage the politics of language, where words and expressions can inspire or subjugate, vital to biblical exegesis. My womanist reading of biblical texts requires a hermeneutics of (1) tempered cynicism, (2) creativity, (3) courage, (4) commitment, (5) candor, (6) curiosity, and (7) the comedic.[6]

Tempered cynicism, as reasonable suspicion, invites one to question with joy of the impossible, hope of rooted faith, with scholarship that helps one appreciate complex engagement. Tempered cynicism questions how one reads lament, its therapeutic value, and if lament supports healing when violence/loss is heinous. Creativity provides a context for church and academy, where normative interpretations and traditions do not hinder new, adventurous, perhaps risky exploration of texts. Using creativity, readers/interpreters explore complexities and uses of lament without denying or glorifying violence, noting where lament can be helpful or disappointing regarding theodicy. Courage provides a cushion when analysis feels redundant or mysterious; offers a setting where readers ask more questions, placing violence and lament in dialog, where cultural artifacts provide understanding for hidden meanings within lament. Commitment to in-depth hearing and just, appropriate living of texts frame the process of significant discovery; and amidst lament makes room for profound encounter and healing, so readers do not valorize violence, nor underestimate lament's power. Candor reveals oppression within texts and communities that embrace and produce oppressive faith, calling to awareness how violent scriptures need to be exegeted to expose patriarchal misogyny—and the pain processed through lament. Curiosity presses one to seek the sacred to push toward heightened inclusivity, mercy, justice, and love, and engages lament to move broken humanity towards heightened openness, well-being, and capacity to engage self and neighbor in love. The comedic reminds us not to take ourselves so seriously that we cease to grow and respect other modes of interpretation, despite disagreement. Lament allows readers to agree to disagree without being disagreeable. By walking in another's shoes, one may find more value in humanity, and lament as gift.

Womanist biblical scholars deal with the absurdity of oppression: calling for justice, new interpretations, accountability, and change, where every person is important and relational. Womanist biblical theology merges theology or God-talk that emerges out of the rich yet oppressive experience of women of African

descent to examine and learn from biblical texts towards doing justice for all. This perspective explores individual and social behavior dialogically with a God/Spirit who cares, and who abhors those who violate humanity.

In contrast, globalization is a business marketplace practice of designing and developing financial, technical, personnel, marketing, managerial, and other enterprise decisions to facilitate economic integration and worldwide interdependence of countries. As such, globalization ignores traditional political boundaries and geographical limitations. Historically, globalization emerged with colonialism, voyages of discovery, land theft via manifest destiny, imperial hubris, and freebooting conquest. Technological advance and interdependence make globalization critical for understanding economic, political, cultural, ecological, and demographic interconnectedness. Globalization includes the fluid mix of transnational entities, production, people, investment, and information, and constructs a new sociocultural, economic, political world order.[7] Globalization exploits and commodifies people, and shifts power to colonialist and empiricist oppressors.[8] Womanist biblical praxis questions: the impact of globalization on lives of poor women; personal and societal complicity; and how a caring community can make a difference. A womanist reading critiques systemic violence, where lament creates catharsis. Those who suffer can name violence, not be victims, know justice, and move toward individual and community activism.

Lament as a Response to Violent Patriarchal Misogyny

Biblical violence is theological, personal, communal, gendered, and ethnocentric. The biblical God reflects long-suffering, loving, and faithful yet demanding, violent characteristics. God exacts violence in creation and control, beginning with Genesis. Sometimes biblical violence functions as a story movement for a higher purpose, and goes unpunished. Any crimes perpetrated against females are crimes against their father or husband, not a personal crime against the victim. Silence is often a culprit. Terrorism is communal violence often emerging amid colonialism, economic insecurity, militarization, and ethnocentrism. Deuteronomic war codes incorporate gender as an organizing category for human experience: males are subject to warfare’s violence; women are deemed naturally inferior. While some argue that biblical sexual violence is

literary not historical, the prevalence of rape suggests ancient Israel is male rape culture, where women cannot have their bodily integrity.[9]

Within the Hebrew Bible, New Testament, Greco-Roman culture, and early church history, from Socrates, Aristotle, and Plato to Augustine and Aquinas, most philosophers and scholars view women as incomplete men.[10] The phallus embodies power: male is self-superior, rational, virile, masterful, and noble; the female is irrational, sexual, animal, and potentially dangerous; male honor, female shame. Male sexuality is aggressive; female sexuality is controlled. Male as penetrator and female as penetrated establishes male sexuality as dominant or superior in totality and women inferior. This bifurcation of human selves remains central to many Christian doctrines and practical theology.[11] Scripture reflects stories of violence and sacrifice of women for the sake of male egos. The stories of Jephthah's daughter and the Levite's concubine reflect patriarchal, misogynistic violence against women, and provide pause for lament (Judges 11; 19).

Although Jephthah has favor, and has no need to bargain with God to achieve victory, Jephthah volunteers to sacrifice his daughter; no ram or substitute appears. The unnamed daughter's only request is for time with her girlfriends before going to slaughter. Daily women suffer domestic violence and out of fear fail to protest. Jephthah's unnamed daughter metaphorically is every female murdered physically and/or psychologically. Some male desecrates her and she does not matter. While shunning occurs globally, and women die daily due to domestic violence and sexual assault or rape, these stories are complex. Violence is thorny, and victim response complicated. Jephthah's daughter dies, and her female friends do not protest. She shows no anger at her father. Patriarchal misogyny dehumanizes and objectifies, but interpreters vary on how they view the daughter's sacrifice, from a needless death and critique of Jephthah's ego to celebrating the daughter's faithfulness, wisdom, and strength, where female resistance amid gross injustice reflects engagement of human dignity.[12] This father/daughter saga is about gender, violence, identity, and leadership. Jephthah's uncertain character marginalizes him and his story is never fully integrated in Israel. His daughter's acquiesce may be a statement of faith or victimhood. In Judges 19–20, the Levite's concubine leaves him, but pursuing her, the host and Levite give the concubine to the Benjamites who rape and leave her for dead. The Levite cuts her into twelve pieces, and sends her body parts to the tribes of Israel. Such violence mirrors the Jeffrey Dalmers of the world who kidnap and kill their victims. Dalmer's obsession escalated into cannibalism. Most interpreters either excuse characters for reproachable behavior or blame

characters for their victimization.[13]

Violated and dismembered, the women (Jepthah's daughter and the Levite's concubine) serve as scapegoats. None are shown to be mothers or wives in the narratives. These texts combine themes of sex and sacrifice potentially to have a titillating effect on the (presumably) male authors and audiences of these texts, and engage attitudes toward female martyrdom and women's bodies as objects of the male gaze.[14] Violence against women, especially intimate partner violence and sexual violence, is at crisis mode globally, and a significant public health problem that violates women's human rights. Numerous markers, from low education, a history of child maltreatment, to addictions and unequal gender norms are critical markers for birthing male abusers and female abused. Further, the impact on children who witness or experience such trauma, known as childhood adversity, can lead to adult physical ramifications (cancer, stroke, cardiac disease), altering cell replication and having psychological and emotional impact.[15] Lament provides space to grieve violence and pain, from the perspective of prevention, never allowing for potential violence. Lament also provides process for dealing with envy, anger, sadness, greed, depression, insecurity so that perpetrators and those perpetrated against can get the help needed to live life to the fullest and embrace healthy relationships.

Various Voices of Lament: Psalms, Lamentations, Beyoncé

Lament is sacred speech that names the deep heart ache and pain experienced on a personal, familial, communal, local, state, federal, and global level. Lament expresses our concrete, yet mysterious grief. Much of this pain and aching is nebulous, not yet answered, not yet resolved or healed. Many people live at the intersections of ancient, calcified grief. Some people know something is amiss, and have tried self-help books, alcohol, prescription drugs, extramarital affairs, youth enhancing surgery, food, retail therapy, new acquisitions or toys to seek solace and a solution to the abyss within, becoming more fragile. Human anguish, angst, and halleluiahs in concert with Israel's stylized rage, anger, and pain get tossed and turned together as an unsatisfying goulash.[16] With a world and a personal life rife with violence and exploitation, of questions that challenge culture and faith, amid alienation and anxiety, displacement and despondency, people need lament.

Lament language, prayers and liberation—justice rituals and traditions—provide a compassionate environment where one can appeal to God and ask for help and inspiration, amid injustice and universal suffering. Humanity needs lament to encourage love, not vengeance amid twenty-first-century terrorism. Despite universal lament, people often do not hear those prayers or they neglect justice rituals and traditions. With humility and gratitude for a relationship with God, one can offer lament for divine help and guidance. With the freedom to create lament within community in mutuality, where all are welcome, shared stories reflect suffering, and acknowledge the pain that ultimately can be transformed to joy. People can experience relief when allowed the space of self-expression. Suffering is an ancient and contemporary reality. Such drama induced by political intrigue and corruption is not acceptable. With global death and tragedy, people create laments, and need more intentional work on laments, to connect with God.[17]

Lament as creative, honest ritual does not romanticize or wallow in pain. With fasting, prayer, deep soul-searching contemplation, space unfolds for profound awareness of pain, grief, acceptance, and space to envision how to process emotions and thoughts about the grief process. As Ecclesiastes people, there is a time to mourn (3:4b), as worship and experience of God. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:3), Jesus provides space for, and authorizes lamentation as blessing. God desires humanity to worship as justice, not be ambivalent or cavalier about human suffering. Injustice calls for lament to make known brokenness, and worship with contrite hearts. Life is not fair, nor always joyous. Yet hope abounds. Lament provides a way to process and not avoid pain.[18]

Lament is a coping device for violence wrought through calamity, tragedy, and failure. Violence is pervasive and involves anything personal, institutional, and/or systemic that depersonalizes, damages, or destroys humanity and all of creation. All violence can lead to disrespect, distrust, and hate. Biblically, God rejects human violence to all creation (Ezek. 45:9; Hab. 2:8, 17). God wants to redeem people “from oppression and violence” (Ps. 72:14), believers cry out to God for deliverance from violence (Ps. 25:19; 74:20; 140:1, 4, 11); the righteous work to motivate God to act on their behalf by claiming they have avoided violence (Ps. 17:4). Deliverance from violence invokes songs of thanksgiving (2 Sam. 22:3, 49; Ps. 18:48). Human violence is catalyst for divine violence. Fretheim notes that it is vital to take godly anger and judgment seriously. Kari Latvus posits that the Deuteronomistic interpretation of God emerges out of intolerance, strict dogmatism, and fundamentalism, an important observation,

however with an anti-Jewish Christian slant. The lament psalms, notably imprecatory laments, challenge one's sensibilities, requesting from God the use of violence against detractors. Judgment involves divine and human factors, often including violence. Fretheim argues that divine violence, within a violent world, subverts human violence to bring creation to a place where violence ceases to exist. Whether salvific or in judgment, divine violence occurs to bring about deliverance and redeem creation. Lament provides space to question and challenge God's actions of violence and punishment (Psalm 44). Biblical patriarchal violence is systemic, supports glorification of war, destruction of cities, and rape of women. If divine violence is never an end in itself, but engaged to accomplish loving purposes and God does not necessarily place positive value on the use of violence (Isaiah 47), some ambiguity remains. God may respond in violent ways in and through various agents so sin and evil do not go unchecked in the world:[19] a need for lament. Here Psalm 22 provides instruction, using a womanist hermeneutic.

PSALM 22

Psalm 22, a plea for deliverance from suffering and hostility, is immortalized when Jesus wails this Psalm of David from the cross, to the Creator/Abba—signifying the state of forsakenness (Matt. 27:46). This instance of horror and agony was not one of theological curiosity, but spiritual desolation, for Jesus already knew the when and the why.[20] In psalms, pain ultimately becomes social, affecting one and others around about, to ever widening circles, making pain dynamic. After one knows pain, loneliness, and social rejection, framed by pathos and loss of self, one yet knows divine intimacy, towards being reintegrated to the community, offering others hope. Tempered cynicism engages various ways the psalms offer responses to pain, and requires acknowledgment of pain, getting help and taking the necessary time to move toward healing, where one engages pain into a life fully lived.[21] Initially, utter destitution seeks divine engagement, but fails to hear a response. Creativity accepts that one recognizes God is holy, has been trusted by ancestors, and God faithfully delivered them, while wondering if this lament is helpful regarding horrific catastrophe, as for instance when one parent burns down the house with a partner and children dead inside. While feeling abandoned, one counters, testifying to divine faithfulness since birth. Courage creates the space that despite various catastrophes, one can believe, yet struggle to know that divine deliverance is

imminent, with praises and thanksgiving, because of divine faithfulness.

As a lament, Psalm 22 provides the space to grieve loss of respect within community and loss of life. Commitment sees that this dirge as permission to testify to the pain and celebrate recognizing and trusting a God who cares. Honoring relationship with and being with this God as daily discipline, not as happenstance and self-satisfying expression, with dis-ease and violence in human life, one relies solely on God, who hears and bears our pain with us, for deliverance, healing, and transformation.[22] Candor, as catalyst allows the one abused to name her/himself as worm, mocked, under relentless attack; yet one continues to connect with God. Systemically, the underlying factors for women of color include supremacy, patriarchy, and misogyny that exists in the world. Simultaneously, the individual and particular communities need to focus on God and remember divine faithfulness. The lament names the pain and remembers the deliverance. Curiosity presses one to seek the sacred as well as justice and love continuously. Accordingly, Psalm 22 pushes to move broken humanity toward heightened openness, well-being, and capacity to engage self and neighbor in love. The comedic allows the space for growth, and respect for other modes of interpretation, despite disagreement. Ultimately, all should live for God: God lives, loves, and protects in the past, present, and for future generations. Victims and perpetrators of domestic and global terroristic violence can also know this God and such transformation.

In the United States, violence incarnated and personified, are barriers to wellness and wholeness: violence—lived, in culture, and court rooms, has reached mythic proportions. Violence is systemic, often couched in polite language, ingrained by supremacist patriarchy, in subtle, frightening terms. Injustice, pain, suffering, wrong-doing, and wielding of power in the language of universal, complex violence. This dehumanizing experience prohibits one’s freedom. Violence, sometimes self-imposed and extremely subtle, as to not be considered feasible for litigation, can be heinous, so blatant that it is inconceivable one human being could exact such acts on another. Psalm 22 reflects that violence is evolutionary and seems to escalate with each generation and heightens in intensity and creativity with increased sophisticated technology in software, hardware, and drugs. Violence displaces the role of holiness, and sacrality of God and of humanity; violence skews reality and is often ambiguous. Systemic violence embodied as racism, sexism, classism, ageism, homophobia, and ableism ultimately undergird and protect structural violence, intrinsic cultural barriers to wellness and wholeness.

Psalm 22, then, requires naming the cancer of domestic violence as it

cyclically infests, erodes, and slowly, painfully, egregiously effects homicidal destruction, generation after generation. This lament lets those victimized recognize they do not have to be punching bags. The communal aspects of Ps. 22 indicates that with God and community, domestic violence must cease so that people can experience life fully, where scripture's eschatological character signifies divine rule and an intent for humanity to live into divine relationality.[23]

In the Psalms, violent, self-righteous, paranoid utterances signal a long human debate, carried on throughout scripture about God's relation to humanity, love and mercy, justice and retribution, wherein truth emerges through the dialectic and across the diversity of voices. Nevertheless, the church tends to turn the other way, making victims voiceless shadows, championing predators as victorious sycophants, annihilating the Gospel. The pain of lament, stands alongside other ghastly texts, and usually are balanced by texts of reconciliation and mercy. Psalm 22 does allow for the voice of horror and pain. We do not need to pretend that bad things do not happen. We do not have to invoke a stoic, puritanical resolve to pretend that all is well. Psalm 22 gives us permission to name our pain, and to seek divine and human assistance in moving toward health and wellness. Lamentations opens with the language of grief and pain.

LAMENTATIONS 1

The socio-cultural context of Lamentations 1, of Jerusalem, eerily reflects global pain and distress, particularly in war-torn countries and in detention camps; all are held captive by those in power. Under Babylonian control, Daughter Zion offers laments as to her worthlessness, thus tempered cynicism questions how Daughter Zion and her community imagine the impact of lament. She announces that God has given them over, those who once were chosen have lost divine favor. Creativity pushes for an awareness of the complexities of lament along with our universal, global condition of devastating losses from natural disaster, terrorism, bullying, and elderly abuse, much loss and grieving abounds. From the natural disasters of tsunamis, hurricanes, and earthquakes due to climate change to the horrific loss of human lives due to wars, genocide, mass shootings, terrorists' attacks, and intimate acts of domestic violence and sexual assault cases we need lament. There is so much to mourn, grieve, and lament.

Like children wrenched from their parents at the U.S./Mexico border, Lamentations 1 contains much distress, desolation, and feelings of being distraught. The suffering of the Babylonian captives, like these children and

many refugees globally, is massive and brutal. Womanist hermeneutic of courage presses the analysis where readers question ancient and contemporary violence and lament in dialog. Having the space to name the cost of violence can be therapeutic if met with courageous honesty, when listening to the voices of Daughter Zion (Lam. 1:9c.11c–16.18–22) and the witness (Lam. 1:9b.10–11b–17), who speak over and next to one another, minus the voice of God.[24]

Commitment to in-depth hearing and just, appropriate living of texts situates this narrative of *Sturm und drank*, of intense pain amidst social and personal ills, where one can be lonely amidst crowds; formerly victorious and flourishing, now Daughter Zion is distraught, bitter, without friends, at the height of distress; with no rest, and much time of mourning and servitude. Her pursuers, like patriarchal, oppressive governments, may even ridicule her with a spirit of *Schadenfreude*, wherein they take pleasure and amusement in her pain, humiliation, or mistakes. Candor reveals times of celebration are gone as religious leaders groan, oppression unfolds as young girls grieve, and her enemies prosper. Daughter Zion suffers at the hands of God for her many sins and transgressions. In her nakedness, a height of shame, she groans and suffers —such is the plight of many victims of domestic and sexual violence. Like her, do others subject to abuse cry out to the Lord about her/their suffering and the strategies of her/their enemies? Her confession abounds, attesting to her sorrow, while wondering about her punishment. There is no request for pity, but weeping because of her plight—the distance from God, her comforter. Within her confession she concedes to God's righteous acts, because of her rebellion. This rebellion has caused distancing from youth, priests, and elders. Simultaneously, she asks that the enemies also be dealt with: her groans and wailing is great; she tires as her heart is faint. There seems no reprieve for the one who suffers. Curiosity engages lament to heightened openness, rooted in love that wonders what to do with innocent suffering not connected to rebellion.

Thus, this is not a text of good news. Rather, this text allows for, sanctions, the space of complaint, of grieving, and of lament. Too often we seek to resolve the pain before adequately reckoning with the hurt. This text brings to mind the egregious, horrific slaughter of nine faithful souls at Mother Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Charleston, SC, during Bible Study and prayer, by Dylan Roof, a white supremacist sympathizer, June 17, 2015. Where did this man learn to hate so? The response later that evening, and at his first courtroom appearance by some of the remaining family members were arresting. While Roof remained impassive, a few family members gave words of forgiveness as they rehearsed some of their pain. How could one possibly know and be able to

offer words of forgiveness when they were still in shock? No one intends to hear that their loved ones and friends were slaughtered while participating in a service at their place of worship. The comedic lens makes room for a variety of interpretations, a process of listening and learning. Lamentations 1 affirms and canonizes the space and legitimacy of angst and the need for rituals that pronounce and help process grief. Cultural artifacts often can help us.

BEYONCÉ AND "HOLD UP" FROM *LEMONADE*

A womanist reading sees that, like the psalms, popular culture exposes the despicable nature of domestic violence, from novels and film to poetry, art, and television. All kinds of music, from opera and country to the blues, R&B, and even hip hop decry the ghastly, revolting assault again and again upon human bodies, minds, and souls. When popular culture responds to the despicable, one can experience lament.

An American singer-songwriter, (1981–) raised in Texas, Beyoncé performed in various singing and dancing competitions as a child. She rose to fame in the late 1990s as lead singer of the R&B girl-group Destiny's Child, one of the best-selling girl groups in history. Their hiatus saw Beyoncé's theatrical film debut (2002), and the release of her first solo album, *Dangerously in Love* (2003). The album established her as a solo artist worldwide, and earned her five Grammy Awards. Beyoncé's *Lemonade*, heralded an "emotional tour de force," by Marcus J. Moore, is raw passion, acerbic heartbreak and devastation, championing the myriad lived experiences of women in general and black women in particular. This edgy yet elegant visual, musical tapestry that combines hip-hop, electro-soul, R&B, and rock celebrates bold creativity that projects her passion for naming metaphors and features that signal the power of black female passion, celebrating identity that transcends stereotypical normativity. Her naked emotions that paint pictures of family, heartbreak, pain, and love tap into her artistic creativity, as interlocutor of the real and the fantastic, affording the listener hermeneutic license:[25]

> We [Black women] live in a world that hates us. There is no way around that. While being Black is beautiful, being Black is also dangerous, and many of us do not survive. . . . [Beyoncé] created a moment full of safety and affirmation to remind us that when this world does its best to defeat us and make us doubt the greatness of who we are, we know the truth.[26]

In addition to black women on screen, Beyoncé pays homage to and works with

six black women: poetically Somali-British poet Warsan Shire; vocals of pianist, singer, activist Nina Simone; vulnerability of black woman's identity resonant with novelist Toni Morrison; African artistry and dance embodied in an iconic African queens—Nefertiti; imagery reflecting African diasporic spiritual practices immortalized through anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston's work; and nods to her sister Solange, showing black women posing in parallel formation to Solange's 2014 wedding photo.[27]

The aesthetic context of this lament visually empowers black women, commemorates Southern culture, and engages the Black Lives Matter movement, Malcolm X, and Hurricane Katrina. Beyoncé represents a scorned demographic, that of neglected black women. *Lemonade*, divided into eleven chapters with title cards describing Beyoncé's reactions to her husband's alleged infidelity, channeling Kubler-Ross's five stages of grief that Ross disavowed toward the end of her life reflects tempered cynicism, engaging query about pain, rooted in faith, ultimately toward healing. The captions include: "Intuition," "Denial," "Anger," "Apathy," "Emptiness," "Accountability," "Reformation," "Forgiveness," "Resurrection," "Hope," and "Redemption," engaging womanist creativity that invites adventurous interpretations as Beyoncé connects the emotional and philosophical with the spiritual. Outside of silent cinema, German playwright Bertolt Brecht invented using intertitles to prevent one from getting lost in the illusion of fiction, participating with the content intellectually, a technique Beyoncé employs to make the personal the political. Knowles takes on various identities and includes black women celebrities and unknown black women, with a poignant engagement of mothers of dead, young black men, murdered by police—state-sanctioned violence, as she codifies themes of disturbance and grief, with eerie images from different times and places: using courage to create dialog between violence and lament. Throughout the video, images of water—which she conquers—depicts baptism, death, and resurrection. Red carpet and/or blood sense, conjure menstruation and orgasm.[28] *Lemonade* is lament writ large, notably the song "Hold On,"[29] which begins with Beyoncé reciting her poem, "Denial."[30] Using religious language of abstinence, fasting, and self-flagellation, connecting her menses to scripture, she questions her lover's fidelity. "Denial" set in watery, embryonic fluids, serves as prelude to the lament: "Hold Up," where Beyoncé emerges through a door, signifying the fertility goddess Oshun in golden garb, and moves through the streets, with a bat smashing car windows. Commitment signifies appropriate living and the power of lament, affording significant discovery. Selasi Bowen posits that whereas feminist scholar bell hooks views the smashing of vehicles as valorizing

violence and anger, and over-sexualizing of women as Beyoncé depicts the fantasy, Bowen suggests that Beyoncé's agency affords her the privacy of knowing her anger and betrayal for what is unfathomable violence. While dealing with infidelity and her own awareness and growth, she deals with pain and moves toward healing and reckons with being human.[31] She exemplifies that candor activates to exegete systemic violence, and processes pain through lament. Curiosity reflects Beyoncé's use of various themes and personal experiences to honor the pain and move broken humanity towards heightened openness and love. The comedic creates the space for empathy, and finding more value in humanity, and lament as gift of process and awareness. This creative, visceral, embodied lament as ritual and process is lament at its best: a safe space for naming pain, living through grief, without apology with the possibility of not being victim. When we name our reality and thus access personal power, we have the ability to heal.

Lament: An Option to Quieten Fear, Enhance Love, Effect Healing

To engage lament as ritual is to move toward a process of healing that shows our complex pain is also God's pain, our sorrows, part of God's sorrows. Ritual as symbolic, patterned activity can engage us as individuals and communities, where we interpret things differently, and ultimately move to restoration of spiritual vitality, bodily well-being, emotional wholeness, mental functioning. When the suffering is particularly horrific and egregious, we need a song, psalm, a lament to give voice to the trauma. Public rituals testify and bear witness to loss, pain, and death which moves us to engage grief, creating a safe space to face memories we would rather forget, empowered to hold the memories with God, in grace, and then letting them go. Rituals help people heal, as they experience intense emotions in honesty, and provide a space for experiencing consolation, as they engage lament language to make present deep wounds of pain and loss, amidst communities where they can know divine restoration and creation's redemption. Such experiences help us connect emotions, memories, words, and images between divine stories and theirs; they know our own vulnerability and finite selves, buffered by God. Rituals help people heal, as they experience intense and God's hiddenness with honesty, without fear. Ritual honesty supports healing. Authentic rituals provide the occasion, the language,

and the gestures for us to encounter realities and truth that, most of us would choose to avoid, moving us to know honest grief, a grief that heals. A womanist analysis that critiques all systemic oppressions allow for creative, in-depth analysis of the need for and the impact of lament. Rituals of lament create space to hold hope and pain in all its complexities in tension, believing that this is not the end of the story. The eschatological space of lament makes opportunities to put in song and story the deep pain and grief, giving it voice,[32] invoking patterned activity with symbolic meaning. The resulting awareness of the pain, acceptance of what is, and empowered action to face the pain honors and validates the need for, and place of ancient and contemporary lament.

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[1] https://truthout.org/video/canadian-inquiry-calls-the-murder-and-disappearance-of-indigenous-women-genocide/ [accessed June 4, 2019].

[2] http://www.religionscell.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/violence-against-women-global-scope-and-magnitude.pdf [accessed June 4, 2019]. Violence incudes intimate partner violence; sexual abuse by non-intimate partners; trafficking, forced prostitution, exploitation of labor, and debt bondage of women and girls; physical and sexual violence against prostitutes; sex selective abortion, female infanticide, and the deliberate neglect of girls; and rape in war. Many potential perpetrators include parents, spouses and partners, other family members, men in positions of power or influence, and neighbors. Most forms of violence are not unique incidents but are ongoing, and can continue for decades. Given the impact,

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[3] G. Brooke Lester, "Psalms of Lament;" available at https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/passages/related-articles/psalms-of-lament [accessed May 15, 2019].

[4] Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), xi.

[5] Womanist theory includes but is not limited to the vast dimensions of theology, Bible and narratives, ethics, and context. Womanism is global and interfaith. Many differentiate from the embodiment of womanism and the capacity to utilize womanist theory in analysis.

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PART II

THE IMPACT OF NEOLIBERALISM ON FEMINIST BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

CHAPTER 11

NEOLIBERAL FEMINIST SCHOLARSHIP IN BIBLICAL STUDIES

ESTHER FUCHS

THIS essay makes visible basic assumptions that contemporary feminist biblical scholars take for granted in their scholarship. As these unexamined assumptions have become the foundation of the current consensus on how "to do" feminist criticism in biblical studies, they are rarely discussed or problematized. They are also not recognized as an obstacle for a more radical feminist interrogation of what has emerged as a new academic field in biblical studies and as a barrier for transforming biblical studies as a whole. Yet, the interrogation and transformation of traditional methods of inquiry in the academy have long been seen as the most urgent priorities of feminist scholarship. Already in the early 1980s, Adrienne Rich identified "disobedience" as the core mission of women's studies while Audre Lorde cautioned that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."[1]

In biblical studies, however, the goal is to legitimize feminism as a viable and reliable scholarly project, and the strategy is to demonstrate that women are well versed in dominant methodological practices and that they can "do" biblical criticism as well as their male counterparts. Feminist Bible scholars thus show that women are just as important a topic of inquiry as men, and highlight biblical women's religious, historical, or literary significance, depending on the researcher's specialization. To the extent that the emerging field has followed the dictates of the liberal market economy according to which traditional academic benchmarks measure competition, productivity (relentless publishing), and

success, and to the extent that the emerging field has sought inclusion, approbation, and accommodation within the confines of an already existing broader field, feminist biblical studies has followed a neoliberal rather than transformative trajectory.

This essay proceeds in six sections. The introductory section illustrates the neoliberal framing of feminist work in biblical studies. My main argument is that this framing sought to add women, inserting them into various sub-disciplines of biblical studies, as normalized objects of inquiry, thereby minimizing or denying the effects of patriarchy. The introduction offers a historical outline of women's studies, which by contrast focused on patriarchy, deepening, extending, elaborating, and revising its meanings and implication as the field moved from a liberal frame of reference to a critical and transformational interrogation of disciplinary knowledge in the humanities and social sciences. The introductory section draws a contrast between the neoliberal emphasis on methodology, interpretation, and validation of conventional scholarly practices, and the emphasis in women's studies (or feminist studies) on theory, critique, and the questioning of received scholarly practices. The body of the essay substantiates my critique by focusing on five specific strategies for normalizing biblical women as subjects of scholarly interest. They include depatriarchalizing, historicizing, textualizing, mythologizing, and idealizing strategies. In each section I juxtapose the biblical studies approach to a women's studies approach within the same discipline. For example, in theology I contrast Phyllis Trible with Gerda Lerner. Alternatively, in history I contrast Carol Meyers with Mary Daly. In the final, seventh, section I call for a move away from the current hegemonic neoliberal framing of feminist biblical studies to a critical, transformational theory and practice, in which the "feminist" emphasis is equal to the "biblical."

Disconnected from Women's Studies: The Neoliberal Turn in Feminist Biblical Studies

The spate of publications, beginning in the early 1990s and continuing unabated to this day, respond to the academic, religious, and disciplinary market demand for new work on women and the Bible.[2] Often these studies neither address nor engage each other; for the most part they ignore each other. Each work is

motivated by the desire to interpret the biblical text “properly,” that is in accordance with disciplinary prescriptive principles and evaluative standards. The earliest publications attempt to legitimize the focus on biblical women as a scholarly pursuit. Currently, however, publications are becoming more disconnected due to emerging subfields that are increasingly fragmented, divided by disciplinary loyalties, methodological assumptions, identity politics, or “social location.” They are also disconnected through discursive practices, such as the use of modernist versus postmodern language. Reinventing the wheel all over again in each subfield generates a seriality of reproductions, repetitions, and elaborations of knowledge, in accordance with biblical studies conventions, and on the other hand, a cacophony of discordant discourses.[3]

Reference works from introductions to commentaries, from companions to dictionaries, apply to biblical women the same procedures that were previously applied to men. But while the content differs from previous traditional publications, the frame of reference that defines them does not. The serial enumeration of biblical books appears in every reference work, the required critical apparatus of traditional authoritative journals is usually included testifying to the work’s bona fide credentials and obedience to traditional rules of scholarly conduct. These formal elements endorse the status quo and the norms of the field of biblical studies. This interpretive move, in turn frames the feminist practice as a sub-genre, a subfield, and a modality within the larger context. While this policy was adequate for the earlier stage when feminist scholars made their first inroads into biblical studies, it is no longer sufficient. What is required now is a reconsideration of theoretical priorities and of the relationship with the broader frame of reference. I posit that feminist biblical studies, defined as a hybridized area of scholarship, not look only to biblical studies for its basic terms of reference and scholarly goals, but also to the broader field of women’s studies for theoretical and practical context.

Feminist practices in biblical studies suggest an interpretive and descriptive rather than an analytic interest. The inclusion of women as subjects of interest did not create a re-vision or even interrogation of foundational assumptions in the field. For the most part, the growing number of publications created yet another subfield in an already variegated field of fields. Even within the new discourses that entered biblical studies, including postmodernism, feminism figures as a modality, a variation, and a subcategory. This fragmentation is also the case with other scholarly discourses, including postcolonial, queer, transnational, and cultural studies. Biblical studies added feminism and continues to stir. Thus, the field continues to expand, diversify, and compete with

other scholarly projects in the humanities.

The difference between various feminist publications has neither been articulated theoretically, nor has this growing body of knowledge been consistently evaluated. In a growing number of ever more sizable anthologies, disparate essays are placed next to each other without any explanation for what may connect them, or what general vision, agenda, or position is supposed to guide the anthology as a whole. As interpretations began to vary and multiply, and distinct perspectives began to emerge, the question of method eclipsed the more fundamental questions about shared goals, trajectories, and the politics of working within the limits of a non-feminist academic context. Feminist scholars continue to seek the approbation of the gate keepers by defining women, the new subject of inquiry within the confining methodological framework of their specializations. While scholars testify to the innovation of their methodological practices, they highlight the unique effectiveness or superiority of their respective disciplinary contexts. The competitive relationship between distinct subfields often occluded any dialogical transactions or any attempt at creating a shared agenda, common priorities, or a feminist politics of knowledge production.

In neoliberal terms, feminist research in biblical studies creates new products for the company. It expands the consumer base and the volume of production. It also revalidates its agenda and methods of inquiry even as, in theory, feminism claims to be revolutionary and transformative.[4] As is often the case in the late capitalistic marketplace, innovation means variation rather than difference, offering the freedom to choose between equally enticing products. Though it engages the surface exclusions of women from biblical texts and from traditional scholarship, neoliberal feminism validates and reproduces normative practices and evaluative standards. It does not question or interrogate the procedures that are supposed to produce knowledge about biblical women or women in ancient Israel. Neoliberal feminism seeks to be included, accepted, and legitimized by the purveyors of the field. It primarily serves the professional interests of a small elite of scholars, competing for a dwindling number of stable academic jobs in institutions of higher learning or in religiously affiliated institutions upholding the dominant religion of the Euro-American continent. Neoliberal feminism is focused on the opportunity to compete in the academic marketplace, not on changing it.

The inclusion of women as subjects and objects of research does not threaten the interests of biblical studies. On the contrary, it bolsters its bid for academic respectability in the competitive knowledge industry of the humanities and social

sciences. The dominant feminist position in the formative 1980s was liberationist, synthesizing a theology of liberation and a feminist liberal agenda of equal opportunity and inclusion. Patriarchy as a systemic problem was outlined as the primary concern of a specific perspective rather than a point of contention that demanded serious debate and reflection.[5] In the 1990s, feminism was defined as a method, an approach, and a reading strategy. Rather than clarifying its political investments, feminist scholars attempted to deny their political interests and highlighted the invented diversity of feminist approaches.[6] This neoliberal presentation framed difference in feminism as diversity, plurality, and heterogeneity, and as a desirable commodity for potential consumers who sought in the academe what they found in the late capitalist marketplace: a rich selection of enticing products competing for readers and students.

In the first decades of the new millennium, racial, ethnic, national identities were understood as a diversification that enabled further specialization and greater fragmentation in the field. The strategy of "add women and stir" which dominated the formative liberal phase, was expanded to "add different women and stir." Feminism was included as a subcategory in biblical postcolonial studies, and "social location" has become a new legitimate category of professional expertise.[7] The entire mapping of this emerging subfield followed the dominant cartography of biblical studies pursuing new and different interpretive trajectories and approaches to biblical history and literature. Thus, feminism in biblical studies has become professionalized, disciplined, and institutionalized.

In contrast, women's studies did not seek legitimacy or approbation from the gate keepers and overseers of existing disciplines, as it constituted itself as an autonomous field of studies. It was intended to question received truths about women in the humanities and social sciences and to expose underlying patriarchal assumptions. The field of women's studies is not content with promoting scholarship by women in higher education or to provide new information about women. Rather, it interrogates and problematizes traditional disciplinary discourses and methods of research. Women's studies scholars thus aim to disobey authoritative discourses and scholars and to point to the quiet collusion between conventional scholarly assumptions and the social oppression of women in culture and society.

As the academic arm of the women's movement, the field of women's studies has been openly committed to transformational and even revolutionary social visions. It seeks to expose the implicit patriarchal agenda of scholarly discourses and its objective, disinterested, and neutral posture. It is suspicious of

authoritative frames and the very concept of method. Thus, it searches for common ground, for an interdisciplinary meeting ground, and for a shared theoretical and political discourse. Encouraging feminist researchers to focus on their own political positions and agendas, feminist theory promotes debate and contestation. It is the product of numerous generations and genealogies of knowledge. Difference in women's studies is not a matter of predetermined social location but of political oppression and the personal position articulated is valued for its political meaning.[8] Women's studies promotes dialogue, debate, and solidarity between different positions, and so the field's norms of evaluation are based on feminist scholars creating connections, bridges, and shared concerns. Women's studies value critical analysis over interpretation, theory over method, and interdisciplinary research over specialization. The theories promoted by women's studies scholars are political but not doctrinal. Interpretation, method, and disciplinary paradigms have been problematized in women's studies because they create divisions, boundaries, and professional territoriality. Keen awareness of the constant forward movement in feminist thought replaces them building on foundations and continuing to question them.[9]

As an interdisciplinary field, women's studies seeks to shift feminist inquiry from disciplinary methodology to critical theory.[10] Critical concerns, sites, and locations do not displace the political but expand the purview of women's studies, intersecting and evaluating them for critical effectiveness and relevance to feminist interests.[11] Feminist theory is the context for interrogating, debating, and contesting the priorities and positions of women's studies and the politics of the women's movement.[12] The categories of race, class, gender, and the body are additional and complementary aspects of sexual difference.[13] Postcolonial and transnational perspectives have more recently been introduced as interrogations of Western, globalizing, and imperial assumptions of middle- and upper-class feminist academic elitism.[14] Feminist theories of the body expose the patriarchal rationalization of economic exploitations of female sexuality and the violence directed at the female body as the object of rape and sexual harassment.[15]

Feminist theory in women's studies is an ongoing collective debate about the field's political priorities. It is consistently guided by a desire for greater inclusivity and effective dialogue between and among differences. It is an ongoing clarification of the most urgent problems confronting women globally and cross culturally. The analysis of oppressive economic, political, cultural, and academic regimes is central to its mission. Biblical studies is primarily concerned with method, with the question of how rather than why. Indeed, there

is a general flight from patriarchy as a concept, which in turn occludes any comprehensive critical analysis of any problem at all. In general, feminism is limited to its earliest liberal definition as a quest for equal opportunity and inclusion within the existing social system, first articulated in the 1960s.[16] Liberal feminism argues not for social transformation, but for accommodation within the economic, social, and cultural status quo. The demand for equality means equal opportunity to compete for resources and compensation in the capitalist marketplace.

Radical feminists, rejecting liberal reformist and corrective strategies, articulated the concept of patriarchy as a fundamental and systemic problem in the early 1980s. They maintained that the problem is systemic and anchored in a patriarchal culture, social hierarchy, power, and sexual politics.[17] This analysis refined the concept of patriarchal ideology and expanded it to expose how it frames the state, law, religion, society, the family, sexuality, culture, science, and scholarship.[18] In the 1980s, the liberal quest for equal rights in the workplace and the opportunity to join the elite professional class was subjected to a materialist analysis of white privilege.[19] A growing number of critiques explained that the interests of liberal feminism did not address those of white working-class and women of color. In the 1990s, feminism was interrogated for its heteronormative definition of women and gender. It was forced to thoroughly re-examine its terms of reference, including the essentialist term “women.” As a result, gender was redefined as a spectrum of differences, and so sexuality has become yet another primary category of analysis next to gender, race, and class.[20] In the first decade of the new millennium, postcolonial and transnational theories forced a recognition of additional intersections of patriarchy with globalizing economies and imperial oppression.[21] Patriarchy was not confined to one particular site but became the name of intersecting oppressions, including the degradation of the female body and the environment. Patriarchy remains a central concern, although its scope and meaning became extended and differentiated. Yet, while women’s studies integrated race, class, gender, and sexuality, feminist biblical studies marks off the categories as areas of distinct professional specialization. This, in turn, validates normative representations of feminist women as straight, white, educated, and professionally trained.[22] Although postmodern feminism, emerging in the 1990s, seemed to challenge foundational approaches framing the field, it further authorized the neoliberal definition of feminism as a rarefied, elitist, and sophisticated activity standing in opposition to the religiously and ideologically committed feminisms of the 1980s.

In biblical studies, the concept of patriarchy has been understood as a term of opprobrium that is either contested or ignored. Rarely is it used as an explanatory frame to interpret women's lack of agency, their invisibility, or their silence as symptoms of an exploitive regime. As we shall see in the next five sections, the rejection of patriarchy requires defensive, apologetic, and idealizing reconstructions of women. Rather than explaining the disparity of women in the biblical world, scholars tend to deny this disparity, arguing instead that women were as central, active, and significant as men.

While the starting point for feminist inquiry in women's studies is patriarchy and intersecting oppressions, the starting point in biblical studies is the Bible and the history of its interpretation by women. The task of feminist inquiry in biblical studies is defined a priori as an interpretation of biblical texts, traditions, and teachings. As little debate has taken place among contemporary practitioners, we can hardly refer to a theory in this subfield. Although the word "theory" has indeed been employed in feminist biblical studies, theory refers to interpretive options, the mapping of reading methods, and the evaluation of the theoretical studies produced. Instead, method itself is of primary concern; in biblical studies it is given the priority in reading biblical texts. As little or no interrogation of the theoretical foundations in feminist biblical scholarship has taken place, a "retrospective" or a descriptive consideration of past feminist exegetical work is the closest we have in terms of a historical assessment of the field.[23] In those studies, pioneering scholars speak about their work individually. We read how the pioneering generation struggled with various scholarly and institutional obstacles before they became full members within a community of professional Bible scholars. In short, existing historical accounts are based on the neoliberal model that assesses the trajectories of individual professional careers within specific institutional locations and religious contexts.[24] Thus, a theoretically analyzed history of the field does not currently exist.

The following sections analyze, theorize, and politicize five paradigmatic interpretive strategies in feminist biblical scholarship. The aim is both to map the field and to provide a critical analysis of these strategies according to a chronological timeline. Although feminist biblical scholars rarely provide explicit theoretical explanations for their interpretations my analysis teases out their theoretical assumptions. Each of the works selected for consideration is also placed within the broader field of women's studies and feminist theory. Importantly, the following analytical sketch is neither generational nor genealogical. Instead, most scholars begin *ab novo*, while a few emulate their predecessors.

I selected feminist biblical scholarship that made the broadest possible statements about biblical women in general. Few of these works outline a coherent theory and even fewer acknowledge each other. Their primary concern is methodological: to demonstrate the superior effectiveness of one's disciplinary approach to others within biblical studies. As for the subsequent generation of the 1990s and the first decades of this century, some of the studies emulate a particular model while others ignore all feminist models by reverting to the status quo ante in biblical studies, namely the descriptive or objective approach to women. I consider publications that explicitly draw on and validate pre-feminist scholarship as neo-conservative. Most of the examined books are best defined as neoliberal because they present their interpretive methods as innovative and even transformative even though these works implicitly valorize methodologies specific to their disciplinary areas or traditional norms of evaluation in biblical studies in general.

Despite the considerable political difference between neoconservatism and neoliberalism, the selected feminist works assume that it is possible to discuss biblical women without patriarchy. In other words, they define biblical women within the disciplinary terms of biblical studies rather than of feminist studies. Despite the selected discursive differences between the modernist and postmodernist works, all of them share the neoliberal assumption that biblical women can be analyzed without reference to the patriarchal restrictions influencing their historical materiality and the ideology that shaped their textual representation. I also posit that this assumption was dominant in biblical studies before the appearance of feminism. When feminist Bible scholars accepted it, the ongoing validation erased the most significant intervention, challenge, and re-vision they had the potential to introduce to the field. By cutting off biblical women as a subject of inquiry from the feminist concept of patriarchy, they presented biblical women as having a unique status. They isolated feminist biblical studies both from non-biblical historical context and from non-biblical literary contexts similar to their phallocentric colleagues. They assumed that biblical studies is different from other academic fields, a problematic view in higher education broadly shared and rarely challenged.

PHYLLIS TRIBLE'S DEPATRIARCHALIZING STRATEGY

Phyllis Trible is the most explicit in her rejection of patriarchy as a structuring

principle of biblical theology. She is also one of the few who defends theoretically this rejection by advocating an interpretive strategy she presents as "depatriarchalizing." A particularly popular neoliberal reading strategy attempts to depatriarchalize biblical texts and to discern recovered feminist biblical meaning. Numerous publications that continue to proliferate to this day frame Trible's work as both pioneering and foundational. Trible's first publication, appearing in the early 1970s, is usually placed at the top of biblical feminist reading lists and serves as the starting point for contemporary feminist biblical exegesis.[25] Many regard Trible as a pioneer because the male dominant scholarly elite of the time promoted her work as crucial to the survival, credibility, and success of Christian biblical theology and biblical studies in general. That her book serves the interests of "our common professional task" and "the dominant intellectual tradition of the West" is made clear in the foreword to the book.[26] A more accurate presentation places Trible's first publication in response to Mary Daly's second publication, *Beyond God the Father*.[27] It preceded Trible's work chronologically and challenged on feminist grounds the "professional task" of reclaiming the academic validity of Christian theology and the intellectual authority of Western traditions.[28]

Daly observes that Christianity in particular and Western monotheisms in general serve as the religious rationalization, justification, and valorization of patriarchal domination.[29] She presents feminism as a disobedient, revolutionary new theory of knowledge, a new discourse, and, possibly, a new theology.[30] Yet Trible proposes the opposite when she recommends the utility of feminism as a biblical interpretive method: "Using feminist hermeneutics, I have tried to recover old treasures and discover new ones in the household of faith."[31] Feminist hermeneutics is recommended for its use and effectiveness as a means to an end. In other words, it fosters the return to already dominant scholarly and intellectual traditions. Trible recommends feminist hermeneutics as a way back into the system that Daly rejects as fundamentally inimical to the interests of women.[32] While Daly rejects the concept of method, Trible highlights feminism's methodological utility.[33] Daly set out to liberate herself and feminist Bible scholars, whereas Trible is professionally programed, socialized, and indoctrinated by her religious, cultural, and ideological tradition. Thus, Trible's interpretive method relies on traditional masculinist preoccupations with literature, tradition, and texts as if those were extrinsic to her own consciousness. The assumption that feminists are by definition already liberated from patriarchy underlies this neoliberal frame of reference that is rejected by radical feminists.

Trible's work reiterates, reproduces, and validates the traditional masculinist method of interpretation, framing feminist interpretation as a new modality or variation on an already existing principle. She explains: "In whatever ways it develops, the liberation of scripture marks interpretation old and new. By using the principle, feminists stand within a long history; by applying it to the idolatrous patriarchy, they introduce a radically new subject. From this history they draw comfort, caution, and courage."[34] Trible separates herself as interpreter from "idolatrous patriarchy" not only as a feminist who has presumably already been liberated from patriarchy but also as a Christian who has already separated herself from idolatry. While Daly sees Christian and other paternal religions as patriarchal and therefore as part of the problem, Trible sees Christianity, biblical studies, and interpretation as part of the solution. In short, Trible's "depatriarchalizing" strategy, touted broadly as a new feminist hermeneutical method, relies on the status quo ante when patriarchy was not yet introduced as a contemporary theoretical problem in the humanities and the social sciences.

Carol Meyers's Historicizing Strategy

Equally explicit in her repudiation of patriarchy as a structuring principle is Carol Meyers. She employs a historicizing strategy that serves as a norm for doing feminist biblical history. Meyers separates the biblical text from ancient Israelite history and, while acknowledging it in the former, she denies it in the latter. This practice is methodologically problematic as her historical reconstruction of women's lives often derives from biblical sources. Meyers regards patriarchy in ancient Israel as a textual production of an elite royal, scribal, and priestly class that excluded women and most unprivileged village settlers. Thus, she acknowledges that the Hebrew Bible is a male-authored and male-centered text that needs to be consulted cautiously as a mirror or window about the social context of Israelite women's daily lives. She defines as her task, such as in her book, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*, to make visible Israelite women but with the goal of showing that patriarchal strictures did probably not affect them much.[35]

In this regard, Meyers' work differs sharply from another foundational book in feminist historiography written by Gerda Lerner and entitled *The Creation of Patriarchy*.[36] Whereas Meyers minimizes the effects of patriarchy on ancient Israelite society, Lerner defines patriarchy as a social system shaping the lives of

women even before the emergence of royal hierarchies. According to Lerner, patriarchy is the historical context and foundation for later class hierarchies characterizing the history of the ancient Near East and Western civilization.

In contrast, Meyers is oblivious to feminist studies that preceded her work, and so she simply assumes that patriarchy is a modern invention. Meyers's objection is also based on unexamined assumptions about the significance of feminist studies in general. For instance, she asserts: "The dynamics of gender hierarchy, as I understand them, are historically specific. The concept of patriarchy is thus misleading unless it recognizes and deals with variations across time. If the idea of patriarchy is not fluid or flexible, then it may not be applicable to other or ancient modes of social life."[37] This assertion is out of place, as Lerner's detailed and nuanced study reconstructs the creation of patriarchy with great attention to its evolution over time. Her historical analysis begins with the organization of the patriarchal family and moves to the more complex hierarchies of Mesopotamian city states.[38] Her social history even encompasses the two millennia that preceded the emergence of ancient Israel and ranges over a much broader geopolitical context, including ancient Egypt, Babylon, and Assyria. Most importantly, Lerner's reconstruction of the history of patriarchy places women at the center, questioning the assumptions of traditional, normative, and descriptive histories of the ancient Near East.[39]

While Meyers seeks to correct the surface exclusions of women from conventional histories of ancient Israel, she does not challenge the basic categories that frame them. This approach creates a compensatory, supplemental, and self-marginalizing history. Meyers' history thus places women "in" frameworks that have already been defined and established, such as family, household, community, economy, or population. Meyers structures her feminist historiography that is called "compensatory" history writing. It seeks to make women visible and to create "herstories."[40] Gender in these "herstories" is understood descriptively as sexual difference rather than politically as a category of analysis. Sisterhoods and communities of women appear to be mutually supportive and harmonious groups to highlight the benefits of domesticity, maternity, and religious ritualism. Meyers applies this model to her analysis of what she believes to be female-headed families in rural communities.[41] She asserts that the women's groups performed "essential functions without which the economic survival and social stability of small pre-modern communities such as existed in ancient Israel would not have been possible."[42] This segregationist focus on women measures women's value functionally similar to the ways of traditional historians highlighting women's instrumental benefits.

Ilana Pardes's Textualizing Strategy

Ilana Pardes also focuses on "women" rather than patriarchy. Although she acknowledges the fictionality of female characters and male authorship, she treats the speeches attributed to them as authentic expressions of a universal femininity. She argues that speech acts attributed to biblical women by patriarchal authors reflect anti-patriarchal women's "countertraditions."[43] The textualizing strategy posits that the female characters do not have any material, historical existence outside the biblical text. This strategy is therefore based on a paradox, or self-contradiction, to wit, that the "countertraditions" are real even though biblical women are best understood as products of the literary imagination. Yet if the women she discusses are fictional, how could they have created anti-patriarchal or any other traditions? As products of the male literary imagination, their speech acts should logically also be treated as fictional attributions, more likely to reflect the patriarchal ideology of the authors rather than as authentic rhetorical, textual, or even ancient-historical women. Pardes devotes her book to uncovering what previous generations of feminist critics apparently missed: the articulations attributable to biblical women. Yet, at the same time, Pardes also claims that the so-called "countertraditions" are textual fictions as if they were real so-called "countertraditions" traceable in the biblical text.

Pardes counts herself among what she presents as an intellectually and theoretically advanced feminists of what she defines as "the third wave."[44] As I argue above, feminist scholars are wary of simplistic notions of inevitable progress and they advocate a genealogical historiography highlighting political commitment and social transformation. Viewed in this light, Pardes's approach endorses not only traditional norms of academic scholarship, but also refers to feminist waves without any historical markers and all but ignores the already extensive research that has been done in feminist biblical studies. Her approach implicitly advocates a shift from feminist studies to traditional biblical studies, from scholarship engaged on behalf of the oppressed to the elitist definition of scholarship as a mark of individual merit. Her book begins with a critique of first- and second-wave feminism, specifically the work of Elisabeth Cady Stanton, Simone de Beauvoir, and Kate Millet.[45] She faults them for their lack of interpretive sophistication and the inability to appreciate the textual complexity of the biblical account of Eve's creation. She rejects my work as well, especially my critique of biblical sexual politics.[46]

Pardes claims Mieke Bal as her model and inspiration, notably Bal's work on the book of Judges.[47] Yet Bal challenges hegemonic masculinist biblical historiography, notably on the book of Judges, whereas Pardes avoids any critical assessments of normative biblical scholarship.[48] Bal also exposes, analyzes, and critiques what she construes as the evolution of patriarchal institutions and the historical victimization of daughters in the book of Judges.[49] Pardes, by contrast, avoids any serious engagement with patriarchy as a history or ideology. Yet she emulates Bal's use of feminism as a modality or methodological approach.[50] While Bal understands patriarchy as a problem for biblical women, Pardes re-casts the problem as a symptom of textual intricacy. She presents patriarchal tradition in a dialogical relationship with women's anti-patriarchal discourse: "My goal is to explore the tense dialogue between the dominant patriarchal discourses of the Bible and counter female voices which attempt to put forth other truths."[51] For the most part, however, Pardes frames this "dialogue" as a marital, domestic, and heterosexual affair and, above all, as textual rather than sexual politics.

Susan Ackerman's Mythologizing Strategy

The mythologizing strategy casts biblical women as products of the male imagination, as derivations, elaborations, and revisions of ancient Near Eastern mythologies. It is best illustrated by the work of Susan Ackerman. Whereas Trible, Meyers, and Pardes insist on the need to create new scholarly procedures to accommodate the identification of women as a gendered category of analysis, Ackerman returns to a descriptive approach that categorizes female characters as a topic of interest and an object of disengaged research. Ackerman does not combine hegemonic assumptions with feminist interventions. Rather, she endorses the status quo ante that prevailed in the 1960s and 1970s before feminism made its appearance as a scholarly discourse in biblical studies. Her use of traditional male-focused practices presents them as universal, neutral, and objective. She does not understand patriarchy as a problem, much as normative scholarship has done for centuries. Ackerman draws on this scholarship as a matter of fact, especially in her treatment of biblical female characters. The revalorization of the authority of traditional biblical criticism legitimizes the traditional majoritarian dominance of men as Bible scholars. It re-legitimizes the authority of traditional biblical scholarship which naturalized the status of

women in the Bible and the profession. Ackerman's affirmation of the traditional consensus is best understood as a neo-conservative approach to biblical women, one that challenges the scholarly validity of feminist work done so far on the subject. Susan Ackerman's book, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel*[52] seeks to replace the specialized approach to biblical women with traditional procedures that objectify women as a topic of interest and that requires neither awareness of nor familiarity with feminist scholarship.

Ackerman criticizes feminist biblical literary criticism on disciplinary grounds. She is especially adamant about the impropriety of literary criticism when she states:

> Most dangerous is the literary critic's tendency to take methodologies developed in fields such as English and Comparative Literature, used there to describe American and European fiction of the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment eras, and then to apply these tools to a text that is decidedly not of the place, not of the time, and most significantly not of the genres that this sort of analysis is meant to address.[53]

The objection to literary criticism as an inappropriate disciplinary approach is typical of traditional historical criticism, a competing subfield within biblical studies. Claiming the history of religions as her specialization, Ackerman uses in her work antiquated literary terminology, including "types," "images," and "genres." Her methodology consists of an odd mixture of rhetorical and historical criticism, normally referred to as biblical criticism, a speculative reconstruction of the text's religious meanings. This practice enables the establishment of false and misleading homologies between the power attributed to imaginary goddesses and the social privilege of their human representatives. Feminist critics have debunked the hypothesis of women's reflected or derived power already in the early 1980s to highlight the tensions and contradictions between myth and the material conditions of women's lives under patriarchy.[54]

Ackerman makes another claim that disassociates her from feminist criticism, even within biblical studies. She explains her position in this astonishing statement: "Unlike Trible and Daly, that is, my interest has been to ask about the biblical materials within the context of their own time and not within the context of ours."[55] She affirms a traditional historical approach as a priority for her work and also considers it as distinctively different from Trible's approach. In addition, Ackerman uses many abstract typologies that provide neither periodization nor any evolutionary narrative. Instead, her historical commentary fixes women's alleged popular religion into an ahistorical, archetypal, circular framework that is disconnected from earlier goddess-centered primitive religious

tradition or male-centered monotheistic religions succeeding and replacing them. Ackerman does not even attempt to account for the historical transition from one phase of religious consciousness to the next, although many feminist religious studies scholars have raised and debated this issue.[56] She also does not relate historically or conceptually the warrior type to the seductress or the queen to the dancer. In short, Ackerman advances an anti-feminist stance as a matter of political principle rather than as a concern with contextual accuracy or historical reliability.

Tikva Frymer-Kensky's Idealizing Strategy

The idealizing strategy presents women as heroic, strong, and prominent as it minimizes or ignores their textual marginality. It is best exemplified in Tikva Frymer-Kensky's work. This strategy returns to the depatriarchalizing strategy, as advanced by Trible, and it largely ignores the hermeneutical strategies of Meyers, Pardes, and Ackerman. Importantly, Fryer-Kensky's endorsement of the depatriarchalizing approach implicitly validates male-authored publications that either preceded or emulated Trible's work.[57] Fryer-Kensky's approach is defensive scholarship that does not credit feminist scholarship for its interest in biblical women. Instead, she upholds male dominant exegetical authority when she highlights its presumed egalitarianism and objective non-tendentiousness.[58] Its denial of patriarchy is apologetic and coupled with reframed narrative references to women as stories *about* women. Frymer-Kensky's romanticized and idealized retellings of biblical texts deny the material exclusion of women from economic resources, social agency, literacy, historical presentation, and cultural meaning. Frymer-Kensky puts biblical women on a pedestal, granting them universal, religious, humanitarian, or national functions, so re-enshrining the idealizing tradition of a feminine mystique. Traditional apologists have a long tradition of relying on the strategy of idealization as a compensatory explanation for gender inequality.

Frymer-Kensky's approach consists of reading biblical references, including marginal ones as stories "about" women, expanding their social roles in her imaginative interpretation and presenting them as protagonists of specific biblical narratives and of the biblical (his)story in general. Her reconstruction does not recognize the textual marginality of women in the broader context. Her neologism of "women-stories" attributes to female biblical characters symbolic meaning. She allegorizes and metaphorizes the female characters turning them

into primary national symbols, indeed into symbols of the nation as such. Her interpretive technique does not merely "read" the women of the Bible, as claimed by the title of her book, but it rewrites them. Yet Frymer-Kensky does not lay bare her strategy, nor does she reflect on it. Rather, she presents the meaning she constructs as inherent and integral to the biblical text. To the extent that she ignores the textual materiality of mediating the "women" she constructs, she performs an idealizing procedure.

Tikva Frymer-Kensky explains her view of what she defines as "women-stories" in this way:

> The stories, then, were not written in order to make statements about women. To understand why they were written, we have to look at each story intently, with all the techniques described below, and also consider them collectively, as a group, reading them in relation to one another instead of confining them to the context in which they occur individually.[59]

To look at each story intently, however, is not necessarily a feminist position. Rather, it is an interpretive technique borrowed by Bible scholars from literary criticism, or more precisely, the normative practice that dominated literary studies in the 1960s. This practice, generally known as the New Criticism, was subsequently questioned by feminist literary critics in the 1980s[60] From the perspective of the postmodern 1990s, the literary techniques which Frymer-Kensky utilizes are no longer as new as she would have us believe when she asserts: "The many techniques and disciplines that biblical scholars use provide new perspectives and reveal many facets of the stories."[61]

Though presented as a literary approach, the idealization of biblical women is theologically motivated. In this regard, it is pertinent to juxtapose Frymer-Kensky's work to Judith Plaskow's critical approach. Plaskow rejects the feminist acceptance of the cultural status quo and the limited quest for inclusion within an existing social system.[62] She criticizes women's exclusion from the patriarchal process of law giving, decision making, story writing, the creation of history, and the formulation of moral and religious principles. Plaskow problematizes the authoritarian and hierarchical normativity of biblical law, the patrilineal genealogy that shapes the biblical nation, the masculinist representation of an exclusive, asexual God, and many other norms that exist in religious traditions even today. Yet, in contrast, Frymer-Kensky minimizes the ongoing effects of patriarchal thinking and advocates separating them from the reading of women-stories. Plaskow contends that this separation is impossible without a thorough revaluation of values. In this sense, Frymer-Kensky further elaborates the neoliberal hegemonic feminist interpretive frame in biblical

studies.

Moving Beyond Neoliberal Feminist Biblical Scholarship: A Conclusion

Despite the considerable methodological differences among the five hermeneutical strategies employed in feminist biblical scholarship, the various works share a general rejection of a feminist definition of patriarchy. The denial of the conceptual, analytical, and critical utility of patriarchy is thus the most significant divide between women's studies on the one hand and feminist biblical studies on the other hand. Women studies scholars have worked hard during the last four decades to intersect patriarchy with other culturally sanctioned oppressive regimes, such as racism, classism, colonialism, queer, or physical ability studies. The rejection of feminist theoretical work by feminist biblical scholars has led to a field that objectifies women and has contributed to the divisions, fragmentation, and disconnection within biblical feminist studies. Ironically, all hermeneutical strategies in feminist biblical studies, except for the mythologizing strategy, classify their readings as anti-patriarchal or non-patriarchal strategies. The mythologizing strategy is based on the neo-conservative assumption that patriarchy is an integral part of ancient history and should not present a scholarly issue for feminist scholarship. While most of the practitioners reviewed here consider their work as feminist, Ackerman does not. The historicizing strategy locates patriarchy in the text, specifically in the male, urban, and elite scribal class that produced the biblical texts, and places "women" in a historical context that is framed as egalitarian and protective of their interests. The textualizing strategy privatizes and psychologizes the meaning of patriarchy, locating it in heteronormative relationships, and subjective and erotic responses. Its claims to define "women" as figurations of femininity, speech acts, and discursive expressions within biblical texts framed as egalitarian and in itself implicitly anti-patriarchal. The idealizing strategy frames "women" in the biblical story framed as egalitarian and appreciative of women's contributions to ancient Israel.

In addition, the five hermeneutical strategies illustrate the current fragmentation of what should perhaps cautiously be defined as feminist biblical studies. The tendency of ignoring each other's publications and to repeatedly present feminism as a newcomer to the field of biblical studies produces unnecessary repetitions. It also undermines any attempt to reconstruct an

evolutionary outline of the field and to produce clarity about the mission and purpose of feminist exegesis. While some works reproduce earlier feminist positions that date back to the heyday of liberal feminism in the 1970s, other studies present repeatedly the methodological utility of feminist meaning in each disciplinary field. Accordingly, for the most part the feminist scholars examined in this essay critically ignore each other because they are divided by sub-disciplinary boundaries. For instance, feminist theological critics and feminist historical exegetes address their respective (male dominant) specialized audiences even as they remain divided by practice, orientation, and method from feminist literary criticism.

Furthermore, the sub-disciplinary loyalties of feminist scholars in biblical studies prioritize methodology over theory. This preference creates divisions, fissures, and tensions that have largely remained unaddressed. Consequently, theory and context which are fundamental to women's studies are largely absent in feminist biblical scholarship. Since feminist biblical research lacks a common language that would consist of shared concepts and references, it can hardly be classified as a field. While theory has the potential to inhibit fragmentation, the historical consciousness of a shared context has the potential to prevent repetition. This essay thus advocates that feminist Bible scholars realign or at least balance their commitments by drawing on feminist scholarship in women's studies as much as they draw on biblical studies. The current hegemonic neoliberal consensus promotes adaptation, recuperation, and validation. What is needed is a search for transformational knowledge, a shift in feminist biblical studies from the "biblical" to the "feminist."

Moreover, the frame of reference needs to be broadened in feminist biblical studies. It ought to include feminist theologians, historians, and literary critics outside of biblical studies. Such a broader framework, rooted in feminist studies outside of the field of biblical studies, would nurture the critical evaluation and contestation of the neoliberal work dominant in biblical studies during the past four decades. If women's studies were the starting point, the current placement of feminist approaches alongside each other would pave the way to dialogical transaction and debate and to the clarification of a shared scholarly agenda. It would also enable feminist biblical exegetes to focus on the political implications of our work and compel us to reflect critically about the purpose and function of our work in light of impending professional and social change. It would foster the kind of critical analysis advocated in women's studies and transform feminist biblical studies into a radical and transformative interrogation of biblical studies in general.

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CHAPTER 12

JUSTIFYING (FEMINIST) BIBLICAL STUDIES IN A NEOLIBERAL AGE

JOHN W. FADDEN

The economization of American higher education in the last decades has forced various humanities disciplines to justify their existence as part of the secular undergraduate liberal arts college. Biblical studies is not immune to this challenge. The neoliberal rationality that dominates higher education makes any justification for biblical studies tenuous. An intersectional (feminist) biblical studies, however, offers an alternative path for preparing critically informed ideal democratic citizens, a common aim of the liberal arts education.[1] The overwhelming influence of the neoliberal logic and the political decisions to defund higher education likely means biblical studies will continue with limited resources to affect curricular changes.

Neoliberalism as Governing Rationality

Neoliberalism invites debate over its usage. The term emerges in economic discourse in various places during the twentieth century. Economists and legal scholars, connected to the "Freiberg School" in post–World War I Germany, coined the term for a program to return to classical liberalism. Pro-markets Latin American economists adopted the term "neoliberalismo" in the 1970s. The term has been associated with various world leaders from Ronald Reagan and Margret

Thatcher to Bill Clinton and Tony Blair to George W. Bush and Hillary Clinton.[2] Neoliberalism has come to mean more than just an economic ideology and set of practices. It is a governing rationality encompassing the various spheres of life.

As a political economy, neoliberalism promotes a "new" return to classical liberal economics. In the United States neoliberalism represents the ideology and policies enacted in response to the failures of the Keynesian welfare state to resolve the economic crises of the 1970s.[3] Where previous iterations of capitalism tended to have state interventions into markets, especially in moments of social crises and failures of liberal capitalism, neoliberalism's solution to crises and failures is to develop more free markets.[4] It contends that public services provided by the state should be privatized and forced to compete in free markets.[5] Likewise, the government should deregulate industries, allowing the marketplace to regulate. The state's role in the economy should be limited to security of properly functioning free markets, introducing new markets when they do not exist, ensuring the integrity of money, and protecting private property rights.[6] In times of crisis, the state should not intervene, as the market will self-correct.

There are some new aspects of neoliberal capitalism. Neoliberalism shifts the notion of competition from an important process involving a large number of firms for maintaining near-perfect markets and consumer choice to a process that results in giant corporations and "a paternalistic concern for 'consumer welfare.'"[7] Neoliberal influence reduces a company's interests to shareholders' interest alone, maximizing the company's stock price.[8] Neoliberalism has witnessed the unprecedented explosion of finance capitalism with debt markets for the masses and derivatives and future markets for the economic elites.[9] At the same time, neoliberalism looks like a "return to the normal course of affairs for ordinary capitalism where the economy grows but so as to increase the concentration of wealth at the top."[10] In this sense, neoliberalism is not so much something new, it is the end game of capitalism that seeks to expel the government's interference in free markets and to marketize the welfare state's public goods and services to the benefit of economic elites.

Wendy Brown suggests that neoliberalism is better understood "as an order of normative reasoning" that has become "a governing rationality extending a specific formulation of economic values, practices, and metrics to every dimension of human life."[11] Accordingly, neoliberalism governs as sophisticated "common sense": "Within neoliberal rationality, human capital is both our 'is' and our 'ought'—what we are said to be, what we should be, and what the

rationality makes us into through its norms and construction of environments."[12] Human beings become and are only *homo oeconomicus*, whose project is to enhance one's value and/or to attract others to invest in the person in all spheres of life, including education.[13] Brown notes that the concern for value, capital appreciation, and growth is not merely to be understood in monetary terms. One example that biblical studies instructors might experience is the student who takes a course with "Bible" in the title expects that their "devotional" or "spiritual" capital will appreciate throughout the semester. Responsibilization, "forcing the subject to become a responsible self-investor and self-provider,"[14] is one of the hallmarks of neoliberalism as a governing rationality. Brown thus argues: "Neoliberalism generates a condition of politics absent democratic institutions that would support a democratic public and all that such a public represents at its best: informed passion, respectful deliberation, aspirational sovereignty, sharp containment of powers that would overrule or undermine it."[15] Since citizens are reduced to *homo oeconomicus*, "there are not motivations, drives, or aspirations apart from the economic ones, that there is nothing to being human apart from 'mere life.'"[16] Brown's study of neoliberalism and its destructive effects on liberal democracy is pertinent for justifying biblical studies as a discipline in the undergraduate liberal arts college.

In the United States, neoliberalism has both racial and gendered effects.[17] The negative effects are disproportionately experienced by women of color.[18] Henry A. Giroux asserts: "the history of the changing economic and ideological conditions that gave rise to neoliberalism must be understood in relation to the corresponding history of race relations in the United States and abroad."[19] Indeed, neoliberalism in America is intimately intertwined with the new racism in the wake of the civil rights movement.[20] Neoliberalism's rhetoric claims the insignificance of race for individual success and is not a meaningful social factor.[21] Yet neoliberalism's vilification of welfare and public services often rests on coded racism. The private prison culture in neoliberal America is another example of racism's continued existence.[22] Further, Giroux suggests racial justice "loses its ethical imperative to a neoliberalism that embraces commercial rather than civic values, private rather than public interests, and financial incentives rather than ethical concerns."[23] Thus, the continued experience of racism is a crisis that neoliberalism denies and is unprepared to address.

The effects of neoliberalism are also gendered. So-called "women's work" is exploited under neoliberalism.[24] In the business sphere, women continue to be paid lower wages than men for the same job, allowing companies to benefit from

the differences. Potential government solutions to remedy this problem have fallen out of favor due to the costs companies would incur and the distaste for government regulation.[25]

Brown observes that neoliberalism naturalizes the heterosexual nuclear family with a male head of household and gender subordination in the process of naturalizing the free individual.[26] *Homo oeconomicus* assumes the kind of autonomy that requires a gendered sexual division of labor.[27] Those positioned as women are expected to conform to the model of *homo oeconomicus*. However, women also face the unacknowledged expectation of being *femina domestica*, the primary caregiver "in households, neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces," for all "developing, mature, and worn-out human capital."[28] Under neoliberalism, Brown argues, "gender subordination is both intensified and fundamentally altered."[29] It is intensified through the privatization of public goods and services. With the decrease in public support for families, children, and the elderly, women are responsibilized to be "responsible for those who cannot be responsible for themselves."[30] Gender subordination is transformed by adding volunteer labor in schools and communities to the household labor that women disproportionately perform.[31]

Neoliberalism has dramatic consequences for democracy. First, it results in a few individuals with immense economic power to influence over political process.[32] David Harvey warns: "The boundary between the state and corporate power has become more and more porous. What remains of representative democracy is overwhelmed, if not totally though legally corrupted by money power."[33] Second, the ideal neoliberal state is skeptical of democracy, governing by executive order and judicial decisions. It seeks to insulate key institutions from democracy.[34] The neoliberal state that loses and corrupts democratic ideals may be doomed to authoritarianism, or even outright fascism.[35] As Brown maintains, neoliberalism hollows out democratic values as "neoliberal rationality's ascendance imperils the ideal, imaginary, and political project of democracy."[36]

As a governing rationality, neoliberal logic is prevalent in the discourse of higher education. An awareness of how neoliberalism manifests in higher education is requisite for justifying biblical studies as an undergraduate liberal arts field.

Neoliberalism and Higher Education: The

Position of Wendy Brown

Neoliberalism challenges higher education and the core of the liberal arts mission. The mission of the liberal arts is twofold. First, it aims "to provide a holistic educational formation for young adults" and, second, it intends "to serve the democratic good of associative living."[37] The first part of the mission relates to critical thinking; the second part of the liberal arts' mission is serving the social good.[38] Yet, the idea of a social or a public good becomes harder to imagine in the neoliberal age. Neoliberal reforms to education result in market logic saturating education policy, performance measurements, and growing inequalities in outcomes. Higher education has become a site of self-investment and appreciation of human capital, a credential to aid in one's future value. This section outlines how American political theorist Wendy Brown describes the neoliberalization of higher education. Her treatment places higher education into the larger discussion of neoliberalism's attack on liberal democracy and democratic citizenry in the United States. Brown's appeal lies in uncovering neoliberalism's saturation of higher education with marketized principles and rationality in ways that biblical scholars may not even notice, to the point that the classical liberal arts mission of developing informed democratic citizenry is imperiled, and with it any form of democracy worthy the name.

Brown's discussion of higher education focuses on the public university and college. While public schools differ from private universities and colleges, especially in terms of the disappearance of state funding or state's control, Brown aptly describes the neoliberalization of higher education.[39] For two centuries, the key premise of higher education has been that the liberal arts provide the tools for understanding the powers and problems engaged citizens require to have in democratic countries. Yet neoliberalism views higher education as primarily valuable to human capital development.[40] Brown identifies four related effects of neoliberal rationality on the liberal arts. First, "*public goods* of any kind are increasingly difficult to speak of or secure."[41] This effect makes the traditional argument of the liberal arts as a public good (because it cultivates ideal citizens for democracy) difficult. People are no longer seen as citizens of a democratic polity sharing power and certain common goods, spaces, and experiences. Rather they are investors and consumers.[42] Second, democracy is "now conceived as requiring technically skilled human capital" and not as in need of educated citizens to sustain public life and common rule.[43] The transformation of the notion of democracy challenges the liberal arts mission,

since knowledge in the liberal arts does not instrumentalize knowledge for the development of human capital. Third, "*subjects*, including citizen subjects, are configured by the market metrics of our time as self-investing human capital."[44] This position implies that students and perhaps even administrators and faculty self-invest in education because they believe it will contribute to human capital appreciation or avoid its depreciation. As Brown explains: "Human capital is distinctly not concerned with acquiring the knowledge and experience needed for intelligent democratic citizenship."[45] Fourth, "*knowledge, thought, and training* are valued and desired almost exclusively for their contribution to capital enhancement."[46] Knowledge is sought for a return on the investment.[47] This final point is devastating for those who justify their discipline for the sake of gaining knowledge.[48]

The status of the liberal arts education, Brown suggests, "is eroding from all sides."[49] In the post–World War II era, widespread liberal arts education found support among families. They adhered to the idea that upward mobility required a liberal arts education and that democratic countries needed a well-educated citizenry. The extension of liberal arts education to the majority of the population, as opposed to an elite few, "was nothing short of a radical democratic event."[50] The United States postsecondary education was "contoured toward developing the person and citizen, not merely the job holder."[51] Higher education offered expanded individual opportunities along with the classical liberal ideal of acquiring a larger view of the world.[52] Because of neoliberalism, this vision has been transformed. Now, there is only human capital.[53] The liberal arts are depicted "as something for individuals to imbibe like chocolate, practice like yoga, or utilize like engineering."[54] The loss of the very idea of the public makes the idea of an engaged and educated citizen incoherent in neoliberal rationality. The neoliberal ordering of higher education "abjures the project of producing a public readied for participation in popular sovereignty."[55] Similarly, other values of the classical liberal arts curriculum such as social equality, liberty, and the worldly development of mind and character "cannot and do not defend themselves in terms of student desire or demand, economic necessity or benefit, or cost efficiencies within the university."[56] Rather, the mission to offer a liberal arts education to the many becomes disoriented toward mere job training.[57]

As higher education governance becomes oriented toward students as consumers and investors, the emphasis for degree z and courses is placed on job training and marketable research as distinct and apart from practices at variance

with market norms including "courses and teaching oriented toward developing capacities of reflection and insight, the acquisition of multiple literacies, and obtaining long, large view of human and nonhuman orders."[58] In short, the liberal arts face challenges in neoliberalized higher education. As Brown puts it:

> Students are pressured by families and cultural norms into choosing business, engineering, and preprofessional majors over those in the arts, humanities, and interpretive social sciences. Meanwhile, universities search incessantly for ways to trim costs by compressing time to degree and making extensive use of summer and online courses taught by casual academic labor, moves that in turn exert pressure to trim breadth and general-education requirements and also discourage double majors—the latter is significant because many public-university students currently finesse the "practicality" problem by combining a preprofessional major with one in the arts or humanities.[59]

While Brown thinks universities will survive, she anticipates "their core in undergraduate liberal arts education offered by prestigious faculty researchers" will be lost.[60] Increased casual academic labor, online instruction, and eroded faculty control over curriculum will further decrease the possibility of maintaining the ideal of a well-educated citizen.[61] The liberal arts faculty, as neoliberal subjects, have configured their research to academic market norms that make faculty poorly situated for defending the liberal arts. Academic research becomes "increasingly illegible and irrelevant to those outside the profession and even outside individual disciplines, making it difficult to establish the value of this work to students or a public."[62] Academic market norms devalue undergraduate teaching since only research enhances a scholar's value.[63] Adjunct labor further delinks research and teaching, since teaching is increasingly measured in terms of customer satisfaction by students who are oriented by a return-on-investment mentality for higher education.[64]

In short, the traditional view of the liberal arts faces challenges in the neoliberal age that values instrumental knowledge resulting in human capital appreciation that hollows out democratic values. Neoliberal reasoning saturates higher education, and so all students, faculty, and administrators are defined as neoliberal subjects. The emphasis on human capital and economic values has resulted in the liberal arts education losing its mission to prepare students to be informed citizens. Brown sums up her bleak assessment of higher education, observing that democracy "cannot survive the people's wholesale ignorance of the forces shaping their lives and limning their future."[65]

Considering Neoliberal Economic

Justifications for Biblical Studies in the Undergraduate Curriculum

In light of the neoliberal institutional development in higher education, including in undergraduate teaching contexts, the field of biblical studies needs to consider its place in the liberal arts curriculum. As secular colleges and universities continue to down-size and cost-cut in academic departments and programs, biblical studies scholars have to defend their curricular existence in the liberal arts not only to administrators but also to students and the public. The question is whether the teaching of the Bible is still a justifiable curricular component in the liberal arts. Neoliberal economic considerations that focus on money, value, and human capital would then need to be identified in undergraduate teaching biblical studies. This line of thinking is certainly new to the humanities in general and biblical studies in particular, but five neoliberal economic arguments stand out. Each of them poses unique challenges to the field, as this intellectual field of inquiry has never looked at itself on a cost-benefit scale.[66] The five economic justifications regarding the neoliberal cost-benefit character of biblical studies are: first, that someone is willing to pay professors for teaching biblical studies; second, that students enroll in biblical studies courses; third, that learning to read the Bible teaches employment skills; fourth, that biblical studies is a liberal arts discipline appreciating human capital; and fifth, that biblical studies faculty are revenue generators.

Economic Justification No. 1: Cost-Efficiency

First, an economic justification for teaching biblical studies courses at the college level is that "someone is willing to pay us to teach biblical studies." This position acknowledges that biblical studies courses exist because colleges have historically offered such courses and hired professors with the required degrees and expertise in the discipline. It also recognizes that administrators are more concerned with financial metrics and budgets than academic disciplines. Since biblical studies courses usually exist in the liberal arts as a collection of courses serving general electives,[67] the first justification can be reduced to a cost-efficiency argument. The question is whether biblical studies courses are offered more effectively and at a lower cost per student than other comparable course

offerings. If not, they could be replaced with other elective courses, but if they are effectively offered with a lower cost per student, then Bible courses should be taught. Yet it is unknown if biblical studies course metrics show better outcomes for students than other comparable courses with a higher cost-per-student. As long as it is unknown, Bible professors merrily continue teaching their courses and institutions are willing to pay them for it.

Yet, the cost-efficiency argument has several problems. One of them is that colleges handle teaching loads and course offerings on a case-by-case basis that depends on the finances of a particular school and the decisions of specific administrators and departments. Measuring faculty teaching effectiveness is also a potential problem. While metrics for courses help to determine how effective a course is for accomplishing particular curricular goals, student evaluations of instructors risk privileging one type of instructor as well as racial and gendered biases. If administrators and committees depend too heavily on student evaluations to determine the effectiveness of biblical studies courses and instructors, it is likely that faculty hires, salary raises, or course offerings in biblical studies will be adversely affected. Further, the cost-efficiency argument does not clarify why biblical studies ought to be part of a liberal arts education.[68] Historical considerations substitute for content consideration for deciding the intellectual, cultural, or pedagogical reasons to offer undergraduate Bible courses. A related problem arises when administrators decide to not privilege biblical studies courses anymore. Perhaps they might argue that such courses are not cost efficient anymore and thus have to be eliminated from the curriculum. The cost-efficiency argument does not hold anymore under such circumstances and other neoliberally adaptive arguments must be developed to explain why the teaching of biblical studies needs to continue.

Economic Justification No. 2: Market Opportunity

Another justification might then come into play, arguing that “students demand biblical studies courses.” This argument maintains that biblical studies is needed because students enroll in them. As such, it is an essential companion argument to the first justification. If general electives are assessed as a market opportunity and biblical studies courses are part of those electives, administrators are likely to see biblical studies courses as a necessary discipline within the liberal arts, especially when these courses are filled to capacity. General elective courses compete for students, and so there are winners and losers in the market. If

biblical studies courses are filled, then the field is a winner in a competitive market.

But this argument is also problematic for four reasons. First, not every biblical scholar is a popular professor teaching courses that reach and exceed enrollment numbers. The market argument puts all the weight onto the shoulders of the teachers, turning them into entertainers, "easy" graders, or otherwise attractive to their student clientele. Ultimately, it is an unsustainable pedagogical situation. Second, the curricular situation for biblical studies courses may, in fact, be particularly dire when students as the "the market" do not enroll in Bible courses anymore.[69] Third, the idea of leaving the course offerings to market forces assumes that the market has adequate knowledge of the courses and why they should be enrolled in this or that course. Demand also does not necessarily take into account the quality of student learning or of instruction. Fourth, the market opportunity argument depends on the existence of a market in which students choose courses from a liberal arts curriculum. But what happens if degree programs no longer require students to take liberal arts courses? Since neoliberalism demands leaner undergraduate programs that move toward the professionalization of degrees, the liberal arts requirements for college degrees may be in danger as a whole. Once compulsion is removed, the market-demand argument might turn against biblical studies. If, as Brown suggests, anxious, debt-ridden students enroll in marketable degrees, Susanne Scholz is probably correct when she states: "The point is that the quest for marketable degrees does not include Bible courses, and hence the curricular status quo does not attract many learners beyond a perhaps-required introductory course."[70] Without compulsion the market will likely dry up.

Economic Justification No. 3: Employment Skills

The third justification views biblical studies courses as offering "skills for employment." As Matthew Baldwin notes, the notion that undergraduate biblical studies is intended to train the next generation of biblical scholars or clergy is "nonsensical."[71] Thus, the third justification appeals to the skills developed in biblical studies courses as transferable to the "real world." Among them are critical thinking, close reading, and effective oral and written communication, to name just a few.

Yet this position also faces a significant challenge. Even if the field of

biblical studies taught these skills well, perhaps students would be better served by more intentionally developing these skills within a practical program related to their preprofessional major. For example, many colleges add traditional humanities elements to their undergraduate business degrees. It does not take an accounting professor to figure out what comes next. In the neoliberal college, redundancies are eliminated, costs are reduced, degrees are completed faster, and the focus is on technical knowledge accommodating marketable degrees. If biblical studies are no longer needed to teach transferable skills, what place does it have in the neoliberal driven curriculum?

Economic Justification No. 4: Human Capital Appreciation

The fourth justification seeks to define biblical studies courses as opportunities for "human capital appreciation." For Gary Becker, investment in human capital includes activities that influence future monetary (earnings) and psychic (consumption) income by increasing the resources in people.[72] It is difficult to suggest that one's monetary earnings will be higher due to enrolling in biblical studies courses. Perhaps biblical studies courses provide students with resources they might capitalize on in their future, but it is difficult, if not impossible, to quantify. From dinner party conversation topics to social justice organizing rhetoric, the Bible is a resource with cultural power to be mined and exploited for gain. But it is perhaps more readily apparent that biblical studies courses increase the psychic income of students who enroll in them. Students seeking to develop their "spiritual" or "devotional" capital will probably see considerable value in taking such courses.

However, two objections counter the idea of viewing biblical studies as opportunities to develop human capital. One relates to an often-observed dissonance. If biblical studies courses are the place for investing in one's human capital to increase psychic income, why do some students not attend free bible study programs at their local churches or synagogues? It is thus unclear what value undergraduate courses in academic Bible studies offer to build human capital. Biblical studies professors are likely to explain that they teach the historical contexts, cultural reception, and critical analysis of biblical literature that assist students to better understand the Bible. Yet this counterargument seems weak, especially in light of tuition costs. Perhaps students are not

interested in developing human capital in a spiritual direction after all. Another objection to the human capital argument is that it is not the job of biblical scholars in secular liberal arts colleges to ensure the appreciation of their students' spiritual capital.[73] Most importantly, biblical scholars are not trained in this way. The argument thus seems to privilege Christianity or Judaism in supposedly secular liberal arts classrooms.[74]

Economic Justification No. 5: Revenue Generation

The fifth justification looks at "biblical studies as a revenue generator." Since scholars in neoliberally defined colleges function as entrepreneurs, biblical scholars operate within a prestige/reputation economy. If their human capital benefits their employing institutions, they keep biblical studies courses in their school's curriculum. Thus, when a scholar's research, public appearances, and media engagements bring positive publicity to the school, administrators "capitalize" on the scholarly work and attract financial support from the school's alumni/ae and corporate as well as private donors. By bringing external grant money to the college, biblical scholars cover their research expenses and prove their value to their schools.

There are numerous issues with this fifth justification that defines biblical scholars as revenue generators. Most importantly, not every scholar may succeed in the scarce grant environment that lacks corporate, industry, or military connections. Thus, even when individual scholar-entrepreneurs carve out a secure place through grants and other revenue streams, there is little in biblical studies research making it a revenue generator for undergraduate programs and schools. Moreover, the notion of scholars as revenue generators places the responsibility on individual faculty members. If they do not generate income for their schools, their continued employment will be in jeopardy. Another concern relates to the fact that government funding of the humanities faces serious budgetary scrutiny. Then there are the potential trade-offs for transforming biblical studies into a revenue generator. Are there ethical, political, and religious lines that might infringe on academic freedom or academic standards, especially when grant money becomes excessive? How might biblical scholars legitimize projects that are not secular and academic, but religious and theological? Hector Avalos offers pointed criticism of academic biblical studies when he states: "[A]cademia, despite claims to independence, is still part of an

ecclesial-academic complex that collaborates with a competitive media industry."[75] Finally, the notion of biblical studies professors as revenue generators emphasizes research and not teaching. As Brown argues, the neoliberal academic economy encourages faculty to self-invest in research to increase their human capital, but it deemphasizes teaching since the academic market does not value it. What then is the value of teaching biblical studies courses in the undergraduate liberal arts classroom?

None of these considerations offer convincing arguments for teaching biblical studies as a vital part of the liberal arts. One of the problems with neoliberal economic justifications is that they account only for things with an assigned economic value. Yet, a liberal arts education is a merit good that goes beyond mere economic enumeration.[76] Merit goods have a visible component that is reduced to human capital under neoliberalism and a public good component, such as the benefit to society to have informed citizens. Unfortunately, neoliberal rationality only recognizes the visible component whereas biblical studies, as part of the liberal arts, is better seen as a public good. The next section discusses how to reframe biblical studies as a public good in the form of intersectional (feminist) biblical studies.

Intersectional (Feminist) Biblical Studies and Neoliberalism

The public good component of higher education is captured in the aim of the liberal arts to cultivate ideal informed, democratic citizens. Rebecca Chopp argues:

> Our country is in desperate need of what the liberal arts can offer. A serious crisis deeply linked to the failure of individuals in democratic communities to find common ground is leading many citizens to lose faith in their leaders, in their communities that are increasingly polarized, and in a long-held sense of the common good. Current practices of democratic community such as tolerance, respect for others, and open debate are becoming anemic and are unable to provide the robust support that a thriving society needs.[77]

The liberal arts offer value for the survival of democracy from neoliberalism's assault on it. In order to justify biblical studies as part of the liberal arts curriculum, scholars of biblical studies need to participate in the public good mission of the liberal arts. An intersectional (feminist) biblical studies approach attentive to the broader reception history[78] and use of the Bible offers a

curricular model that aids in creating informed democratic citizens. First, undergraduate biblical studies in the liberal arts curriculum should be intersectional in its approach. Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge provide a general description of intersectionality:

> Intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. Intersectionality as an analytic tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world and of themselves.[79]

While intersectionality has become a buzzword, womanist and black feminist biblical studies have always been intersectional. As Nyasha Junior notes: "In general, womanist scholarship utilizes the gains of feminist scholarship but attempts to move beyond gendered-focused analysis. Womanist approaches stress the concept of intersectionality."[80] Gender, race, sexuality, and class are but a few of the intersecting analytical lenses womanist approaches adopt. Womanist biblical scholars have produced critical work for studying the Bible that is relevant to undergraduate biblical studies in the liberal arts.[81] The intersectional analysis of biblical texts and the grounding of the analysis in contemporary communities makes womanist scholarship a critical model for students as they learn how to read cultural texts.[82]

Second, undergraduate biblical studies as part of the liberal arts curriculum should be attentive to the reception history of the Bible and how people read the Bible. Intersectional (feminist) biblical studies provides liberal arts students with critical lenses for looking at the Bible as an ancient text as well as a cultural text that is used by contemporary communities. In the United States context, the approach allows undergraduates to investigate the Bible as a cultural text.[83] Students will explore how the Bible and its interpretation have been sites of struggle throughout the history of the United States, from the earliest colonization and exploration by Europeans to the current era. Intersectional (feminist) approaches will also inform students about the Bible around the globe, as intersectional (feminist) approaches challenge normative "objective" biblical readings and show the subjective nature of any biblical exegesis and its consequences in the world.

As a part of the liberal arts curriculum the intersectional approach supports the aim of the liberal arts to produce informed citizens. Undergraduate biblical

studies introduce students to various scholarly and non-scholarly interpretations, as students learn to assess the biblical texts and their effects in society.[84] Students begin to see the Bible as a cultural text. They also learn to critically evaluate texts from multiple perspectives and consider what is at stake, what is gained and lost, and who matters in the arguments.

Importantly, intersectional (feminist) approaches reject the reduction of the human to *homo oeconomicus*. Biblical studies courses provide students with a context to ask questions about humanity and to look at how other humans—writers and interpreters of the Bible—have struggled with questions about their own humanity. Since biblical studies courses are developed as a secular learning environment, student come to realize that the Bible is one text among many from different cultures and eras. Thus, biblical studies courses can, and should, be thought of as a public good that belongs in liberal arts education. Although Avalos deems the Bible to be "irrelevant" for today,[85] this viewpoint does not mean that its scholarly study is irrelevant. Rather, as a collection of human texts with considerable historical and cultural impact of global proportions, the Bible continues to influence human communities. Students thus benefit from a robust understanding of the Bible's origins, its reception history, and its uses and abuses in history. If we were to abandon the academic study of the Bible in the liberal arts context at this historical moment, it would cause public harm. It surrenders biblical text to those who use it to subjugate and oppress fellow human beings even today.

However, it must be acknowledged that the public-good justification for biblical studies requires an alternative curriculum to the dominant historical critical one.[86] Sadly, the prime challenge to implementing curricular changes to intersectional (feminist) biblical studies in the neoliberal age is economic. The academic marketplace has limited investments in curricular development when the changes do not provide an immediate economic return on investment. The academic market encourages tenured and tenure-track faculty to focus on research rather than on curriculum and pedagogical matters. Contingent faculty lack the resources to make changes to their course offerings. In her discussion on biblical studies as part of the liberal arts curriculum Scholz observes that "[n]eoliberal interests endorse investments in business, engineering, and science departments while humanities receive neoliberal glances of suspicion."[87] Biblical studies thus is in "survival mode": "Money is tight, socio-cultural and political support often minimal, and intellectual space for curricular exploration is rare. Neoliberal authorities demand justifications of the curricular status quo and if they are not forthcoming, degrees, departments, and even entire schools

disappear."[88] A neoliberal future does not look promising for the teaching of biblical studies in undergraduate liberal arts settings.

Conclusion

Like other undergraduate humanities fields in the liberal arts, biblical studies survive on a case-by-case basis in a neoliberal age. This essay has explored five neoliberal economic arguments that biblical studies scholars might use to justify the field's presence in a liberal arts education. First, biblical studies courses are cost-efficient; second, biblical studies courses meet market demands; third, biblical studies courses teach employment skills; fourth, biblical studies courses allow students to appreciate their human capital; and fifth, biblical scholars as entrepreneurs offer their employing schools additional revenue streams. Yet the discussion also indicated that each justification is problematic. Economic justifications fall short for biblical studies because the discipline is not directed toward enhancing the future monetary earnings of undergraduate students. As a collection of courses, biblical studies requires significant time investment that take students' attention away from "practical," preprofessional courses that offer visible returns on the human capital of the students.

Thus, undergraduate biblical studies might have a place in the neoliberal curriculum only if students, administrators, faculty, and the public affirm the ideal of the liberal arts. An intersectional (feminist) biblical studies has the potential to uphold the democratic ideals and mission of the liberal arts to cultivate informed democratic citizens. By teaching students to approach the Bible and its interpreters with multiple analytical lenses, such as gender, race, class, sexuality, or disability, biblical studies courses prepare students to better understand an important cultural and religious text. By learning about the Bible's reception history and its varied uses and abuses in its various reading communities, students will develop informed notions of the Bible as a cultural and religious text. Such courses may, in fact, contribute to the public good, but the problem is, of course, that neoliberal reasoning does not value public goods.

The saturation of the neoliberal convictions in higher education threatens both the liberal arts and undergraduate biblical studies. The intersectional (feminist) biblical studies approach requires changes in the traditional biblical studies curriculum that moves it away from historical criticism. Yet according to neoliberal convictions, curricular changes require investment in human capital. Unfortunately, the academic economy values investment in research and

publication over investment in teaching or the curriculum. As a result, the economic incentive to adopt changes is minimal. Yet without making curricular changes that challenge the neoliberal reasoning, the field of biblical studies remains stuck in the dominant neoliberal discourse, adhering to the notion that higher education is an economic good for individuals. Consequently, the academic teaching of the Bible will become the domain of an elite few who do not have to concern themselves with the financial realities of higher education. The prospect that feminist, womanist, or any other intersectional approach to the Bible will survive, much less thrive, in the neoliberal higher education paradigm seems unlikely.

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[1] The parentheses (feminist) is intended to mark my unease to label my proposal as "feminist" as I am not sure it is the appropriate umbrella term for the ethos advocated since not all who advance intersectional biblical studies would classify themselves as feminist and would perhaps feel mislabeled having their work described under this title.

[2] Manfred B. Steger and Ravi K. Roy, *Neoliberalism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), ix–x.

[3] Michael C. Howard and John E. King, *The Rise of Neoliberalism in Advanced Economies: A Materialist Analysis* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 2.

[4] "The principal tenet of neoliberalism is that optimal outcomes will be achieved if the demand and supply for goods and services are allowed to adjust to each other through the price mechanism, without interference by government or other forces—though subject to the pricing and marketing strategies of

oligopolistic corporations." Colin Crouch, *The Strange Non-Death of Neoliberalism* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2011), 17.

[5] Crouch, *The Strange Non-Death of Neoliberalism*, chap. 4.

[6] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 2–3.

[7] Crouch, *The Strange Non-Death of Neoliberalism*, 17.

[8] Ibid., 57.

[9] Ibid., 114.

[10] Sanford Schram, *The Return of Ordinary Capitalism: Neoliberalism, Precarity, Occupy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 6. See also, Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 19.

[11] Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2015), 30. Brown, and others, is indebted to the work of Michel Foucault on governmentality. Brown engages primarily with Foucault's conception of neoliberalism in Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France, 1978–79*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

[12] Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 36.

[13] Ibid., 33.

[14] Ibid., 84. See also, Schram, *The Return of Ordinary Capitalism*, 4, 25.

[15] Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 39.

[16] Ibid., 44.

[17] Neoliberalism's oft criticized globalizing effects in other countries are beyond my admittedly limited summary.

[18] Keri Day, *Religious Resistance to Neoliberalism: Womanist and Black Feminist Perspectives*, Black Religion/Womanist Thought/Social Justice (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

[19] Henry Giroux, *Against the Terror of Neoliberalism: Politics Beyond the Age of Greed* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2008), 79.

[20] Randolph Hohle argues that racism is at the origins of American neoliberalism. Randolph Hohle, *Race and the Origins of American Neoliberalism* (Routledge Research in Race and Ethnicity 12; New York, NY: Routledge, 2015).

[21] For a critical indictment of neoliberal racism, see Giroux, *Against the Terror of Neoliberalism*, 60–83.

[22] On the connection between neoliberalism, incarceration, and racism, see Noah De Lissovoy, "Conceptualizing the Carceral Turn: Neoliberalism, Racism, and Violation," *Critical Sociology* 39.5 (2012): 739–55. While not engaged in a discussion of neoliberalism, see Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2012).

[23] Giroux, *Against the Terror of Neoliberalism*, 65.

[24] See Robin Truth Goodman, *Gender Work: Feminism after Neoliberalism* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

[25] For a political example, since 1997, the U.S. Congress has regularly failed to pass a Paycheck Fairness Act to improve upon existing laws. For a legal example, in the spring of 2017, the U.S. Department of Labor requested salary information from Google as part of an ongoing investigation into systematic compensation disparities. Google argued that compiling the information would cost the firm $100,000 and 500 hours of work. In the firm's opinion the request is too burdensome and logistically difficult for the

technology firm to comply. Google also claims this violates employee privacy laws and that the government's demands were unconstitutional overreaches. Sam Levin, "Accused of Underpaying Women, Google Says It's Too Expensive to Get Wage Data," *The Guardian*, May 26, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/may/26/google-gender-discrimination-case-salary-records.

[26] Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 101.

[27] Ibid., 103.

[28] Ibid., 104–5.

[29] Ibid., 105.

[30] Ibid., 105. See also, Goodman, *Gender Work*, 8. Brown neglects the additional responsibilities women of color are forced to assume in relation to the racial effects of neoliberalism in the U.S. Women of color are disproportionately the subjects alienated by neoliberalism. See K. Day, *Religious Resistance to Neoliberalism*.

[31] Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 106.

[32] Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 34.

[33] Ibid., 77–8.

[34] Ibid., 66.

[35] Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 37. Harvey endorses Polayni's view on the degeneration of freedom in Karl Polayni, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1954).

[36] Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 201.

[37] Rebecca Chopp, Susan Frost, and Daniel H. Weiss, eds., *Remaking College: Innovation and the Liberal Arts* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 2.

[38] Rebecca Chopp, "Remaking, Renewing, Reimagining," in *Remaking College*, ed. Chopp, Frost, and Weiss, 13. Rebecca Chopp, writing about residential liberal arts college, sees three primary principles for its education: "critical thinking, moral and civil character, and using knowledge to improve the world."

[39] Brown briefly describes neoliberalism's effect on higher education in her introduction, her fuller discussion occurs in chap. 6, "Educating Human Capital," in *Undoing the Demos*, 22–4 and 175–200. Brown also notes that elite private schools have unique commodities—prestige and social networks—that make it possible for the private elites to not experience the same pressures faced by the liberal arts elsewhere; see Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 192–3.

[40] Ibid., 175–6.

[41] Ibid., 176.

[42] Ibid., 176. See also, Henry A. Giroux, *Neoliberalism's War on Education* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2014), 21.

[43] Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 177. See also, Giroux, *Neoliberalism's War on Education*, 34.

[44] Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 177.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid., 178.

[48] For instance, Stanley Fish seems to advocate this knowledge-for-the-sake-of-knowledge position when

he rejects attempts to justify academic work in non-academic terms; see Stanley Fish, *Save the World on Your Own Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 98–152.

[49] Brown states: "Cultural values spurn it, capital is not interested in it, debt-burdened families anxious about the future do not demand it, neoliberal rationality does not index it, and, of course, states no longer invest in it"; see Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 180–1.

[50] Ibid., 185.

[51] Ibid., 185.

[52] Ibid., 187.

[53] Ibid., 182–3. See also, Giroux, *Neoliberalism's War on Education*, 34.

[54] Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 188.

[55] Ibid., 183–4.

[56] Ibid., 192.

[57] Ibid., 193.

[58] Ibid., 183. See also, Schram, *The Return of Ordinary Capitalism*, 135–40.

[59] Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 183.

[60] Ibid., 194.

[61] Ibid., 194–5.

[62] Ibid., 196.

[63] Ibid., 196.

[64] Ibid., 197–8.

[65] Ibid., 179. See also Schram, *The Return of Ordinary Capitalism*, 150.

[66] It should be recognized that the justification of biblical studies also depends on the department in which the teaching of biblical studies is housed. I am not even going to attempt justifying biblical studies as a free-standing department in a secular liberal arts context. My assumption, perhaps unfounded, is that biblical studies courses are located in departments of religion or religious studies or philosophy and religious studies, or perhaps in a classics department.

[67] The place of biblical studies in U.S.-American secular liberal arts colleges lacks data. We need good data on what courses are offered, what students take biblical studies courses, who the instructors are, and more. Anecdotal evidence suggests biblical studies courses are primarily general electives for non-majors, but this situation may also be the case for other academic disciplines.

[68] Matthew C. Baldwin, "The Touchstone Text: A Forensic Rational for Biblical Studies in American Liberal Education" in *Teaching the Bible in the Liberal Arts Classroom*, ed. Jane S. Webster and Glenn S. Holland (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012), 17. "But although it may be easy for biblical scholars to convince administrators (or themselves) *that* biblical studies *can* fit into liberal education, there has yet to emerge a persuasive account of *why* biblical studies *ought* to remain in its demonstrably privileged position."

[69] Another place where more data would be useful would be to see if enrollment numbers across liberal arts based biblical studies support the market-demand argument when compared to non-biblical studies liberal arts courses. If such information was available, administrators might use it to evaluate the instructors who do not meet the general numbers or who exceed them. This would "responsibilize" instructors to meet enrollment goals in new ways.

[70] Susanne Scholz, “Occupying Academic Biblical Teaching: The Architecture of Educational Power and the Biblical Studies Curriculum,” in *Teaching the Bible in the Liberal Arts Classroom*, ed. Webster and Holland, 41.

[71] Baldwin, “The Touchstone Text,” 24.

[72] Gary S. Becker, *Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis, with Special Reference to Education* (second ed.; New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1975), 9. While Becker focuses on the economic effects of education, he does not mean “to imply that other effects are unimportant, or less important than the economic ones” (11).

[73] But see Whitney Bauman, Joseph A. Marchal, Karline McLain, Maureen O’Connell, and Sara M. Patterson, “Teaching the Millennial Generation in the Religious and Theological Studies Classroom,” *Teaching Theology and Religion* 17.4 (2014): 301–22.

[74] See Caryn D. Riswold, “Teaching the College ‘Nones’: Christian Privilege and the Religion Professor,” *Teaching Theology and Religion* 18.2 (2015): 133–48.

[75] Hector Avalos, *The End of Biblical Studies* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007), 15.

[76] Crouch, *The Strange Non-Death of Neoliberalism*, 37.

[77] Chopp, “Remaking, Renewing, Reimagining,” 21. Also see. Giroux, *Neoliberalism’s War on Education*, 142.

[78] Some forty-five years ago, Wilfred Cantwell Smith suggested how the study of the Bible might be done in religious studies. I would like to consider “reception history” from this perspective. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, “The Study of Religion and the Study of the Bible,” *JAAR* (1971): 131–40. See also, Timothy Beal “Reception History and Beyond: Toward the Cultural History of Scripture,” *BibInt* 19 (2011): 357–72; Timothy Beal, *The Rise and Fall of the Bible: The Unexpected History of An Accidental Book* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011).

[79] Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality* (Key Concepts; Malden, MA: Polity, 2016), 2.

[80] Nyasha Junior, “Womanist Biblical Interpretation,” in *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World: An Introduction to Feminist Biblical Scholarship in Honor of Katharine Doob Sakenfeld*, ed. Linda Day and Carolyn Pressler (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 39.

[81] Weems offers two early works, Renita J. Weems, *Just a Sister Away: Understanding the Timeless Connection between Women of Today and Women in the Bible* (New York, NY: Warner Books, 1988) and Renita J. Weems, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996). Some recent works include Mitzi J. Smith, ed., *I Found God in Me: A Womanist Biblical Hermeneutics Reader* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015); Nyasha Junior, *An Introduction to Womanist Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2015); Gay L. Byron and Vanessa Lovelace, eds., *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2016). See also, Wilda C. Gafney, *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to Women of the Torah and the Throne* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2017).

[82] Womanist biblical studies is not the only kind of intersectional (feminist) biblical studies, but serves as a representative of the sort of approach to biblical studies that supports the aims of the cultivation of ideal citizens. As a non-African American non-woman, I hesitate to appropriate the title “womanist” for the project. Rather, it serves as a model for how biblical scholars might consciously perform intersectional analyses.

[83] Baldwin, “The Touchstone Text,” 25. For example, Baldwin suggests the Bible as a touchstone text is important for the U.S., citing Pew stats that the majority of students either are or will be self-identifying Christians, others non-Christians have to come into contact with Christians: “this demographic reality

creates a perennial pressure on the academy . . . to include discourse about the Bible in the curriculum." Two recent contributions for the Bible and American culture: Claudia Setzer and David A. Shefferman, eds., *The Bible and American Culture: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2011); Philip Goff and Arthur E. Farnsley II, eds., *The Bible in American Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[84] See Glenn S. Holland, "'Not as the Scribes': Teaching Biblical Studies in the Liberal Arts Context," in *Teaching the Bible in the Liberal Arts Classroom*, ed. Webster and Holland, 56–64.

[85] Avalos, *The End of Biblical Studies*, 17.

[86] Collin Cornell and Joel M. Lemon, "How We Teach Introductory Bible Courses: A Comparative and Historical Sampling," *Teaching Theology & Religion*, 19.2 (2016), 114–42. But note their study rests on the limited information available from course syllabi which may or may not capture all of the variety the instructor employs in the classroom. See Caryn A. Reeder, Tat-siong Benny Liew, Jane S. Webster, Alicia J. Batten, and Chris Frilingos, "Response to 'How We Teach Introductory Bible Courses,'" *Teaching Theology & Religion*, 19.2 (2016): 143–53.

[87] Scholz, "Occupying Academic Biblical Teaching," 33.

[88] Ibid., 34.

CHAPTER 13

EUROPEAN FEMINIST BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP IN THE NEOLIBERAL ERA

HANNA STENSTRÖM

THE advertisement of a book about the experiences of early career feminist academics in today's neoliberal universities states:

> Higher education is fast-changing, increasingly market-driven, and precarious. In this context, entering the academy as an early career academic presents both challenges and opportunities. Early career academics frequently face the prospect of working on fixed term contracts, with little security and no certain prospect of advancement, while constantly looking for the next role. Being a feminist academic adds a further layer of complexity: the ethos of the marketising university where students are increasingly viewed as "customers" may sit uneasily with a politics of equality for all. Feminist values and practice can provide a means of working through the challenges, but may also bring complications.[1]

Times have changed since the emergence of feminist scholarship in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Gone are the days when female feminist scholars of various fields decided to turn their feminist-movement work into academic research and to create feminist knowledge out of androcentrically dominated concepts, histories, texts, and stories. Early feminists were part of the second-wave women's movement, creating knowledge from women's experiences. Topics, such as sexual violence, received scholarly investigation for the first time in the history of academic research. Hitherto neglected topics and scholarly areas of investigation started to become important in academic teaching and research, as feminist scholars developed feminist theories with which they examined the experiences of variously located women. Similarly, feminist biblical exegetes

began interpreting the sacred texts of their religious traditions in the attempt to expose patriarchal structures, practices, and theories. Often feminist exegetes aimed for transforming the texts toward gender justice and equality. Sometimes they aimed to expose the texts for their misogyny, heteronormativity, and general sociopolitical, culture, and religious oppressive nature.

In this way, feminist scholars have been part of larger movements for social change. To this day, feminists investigate how gender ideologies of patriarchal societies shape academic institutions, how processes of producing and transmitting knowledge favor the male subject, and how what counts as knowledge is profoundly biased toward androcentric assumptions within variously defined systems of domination. As in all fields of feminist and gender studies, some feminist scholars maintain that feminist scholars must also be sociopolitical activists. Thus, for instance, some biblical scholars have practiced their activism within their religious communities to adhere to the conviction that feminist academic work must be put into political practice. Other feminists contend that even strictly academic work is political work because academic research and teaching are central to societal cohesion. As feminist scholars write, publish, and teach, they already work as social and political actors, without the need for them to engage in further political activism.

From the beginning, feminist research asserted that strong connections exist between knowledge and power. Feminist scholars have thus developed different theories for understanding these connections. For instance, standpoint feminist theories and feminist poststructuralism are well-known feminist theories that account for the epistemological implications and assumptions of feminist knowledge and power. In other words, feminist scholars belong to a larger group of critical scholars who recognize the political character of the creation and transmission of knowledge. Unsurprisingly, then, most feminist scholars, including feminist biblical scholars, share the conviction that it is possible and indeed necessary to integrate research, writing, and teaching for the promotion of democracy, with an emphasis on gender equality in the world.

Over the last few decades, feminist scholars have gradually recognized the necessity to relate gender analyses to other structures of domination, such as race, ethnicity, and class, and to understand all of these structures as being part of interlocking systems of social, political, economic, cultural, and religious oppression. More recently, feminist scholars confront yet another element in the interlocking systems of oppression. The emergence of “the neoliberal university” challenges the very identity of feminist scholarship and the very existence of feminist scholars. Academic workers, including feminist scholars, face economic

and institutional precarity and the increasing expectation to monetize their academic work within neoliberal academic institutions. Feminist Bible scholars also experience the neoliberal university although the circumstances are different according to country, university system, or institution. The neoliberal university with all its difficulties is a daily reality for some feminist Bible scholars while others work at academic institutions that have not (yet) implemented the same degree of austerity measures so characteristic of neoliberalism. Nevertheless, the emergence of "the neoliberal university" is an increasing reality.

More specifically, the so-called Bologna Declaration was implemented by twenty-nine education ministers from across Europe since the late 1990s.[2] Committed to harmonizing the architecture of the European higher education system, the ministers wanted to ensure comparability of the academic standards and higher-education qualifications in the many regions and countries across Europe. The institutional changes involved not only the twenty-eight members of the European Union, including the U.K., but a total of forty-eight European countries.[3] Defined by many neoliberal assumptions and characteristics, the Bologna Process has been criticized for neoliberalizing historically grown and established European universities.[4] Nowadays, all feminist biblical scholars in Europe work within this newly implemented neoliberal system. Despite local or country-wide differences, all of us need to address the challenges of the Bologna Process and the increasing neoliberalization of European academic labor.

Different starting points come to mind for the analysis of the current conditions of feminist academic labor at neoliberal universities. One starting point would be based on the sharing of experiences. Another starting point could be Angeliki Alvanoudi's essay entitled "Teaching Gender in the Neoliberal University."[5] Alvanoudi's depicts the positive and negative consequences of the Bologna Process for women's and gender studies programs in Europe. The many publications appearing in the essay elaborate on the Bologna Process from feminist perspectives. It becomes obvious that the Bologna Process is part of the neoliberalization of research and higher education in Europe, and that European feminist scholars have to examine and develop proposals to move beyond the imposed institutional limitations.

The current essay proceeds in three sections. One section introduces the nature and characteristics of neoliberalism. Another section discusses the characteristics of the neoliberal university. Yet another section outlines how feminist biblical scholars think about neoliberal principles, ideas, and developments in (feminist) biblical studies. The conclusion outlines a feminist future for resisting the neoliberally designed universities, especially within the

European context.

What is Neoliberalism?

The term “neoliberalism” has several meanings.[6] In economics, for example, neoliberalism is defined as a particular contemporary form of (global) capitalism.[7] Manfred B. Steger and Ravi K. Roy published a comprehensive introduction on neoliberalism, entitled *Neoliberalism: A Very Short Introduction*.[8] The book focuses on the relations between neoliberalism and other forms of liberalism. It also discusses neoliberalism as a political and economic project, which included the political agenda of the British prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, and the U.S.-American president, Ronald Reagan in the 1980s. Thus, Steger and Roy consider neoliberalism as “a rather broad and general concept” that refers to “an economic model or paradigm that rose to prominence in the 1980s.”[9] According to their definition, neoliberalism is a phenomenon with three dimensions. Neoliberalism is an ideology, a mode of governance, and a policy package.[10]

First, Steger and Roy define neoliberalism as an ideology because they regard ideologies as “systems of widely shared ideas and beliefs that are accepted as truth by significant groups in society.” Accordingly, ideologies are “indispensable cognitive maps” that guide human beings through complex political landscapes. Ideologies offer images of the world mapping the world as it is, but the images also suggest how the world ought to be. Thus, ideologies “organize their core ideas into truth-claims that encourage people to act in certain ways. These claims are assembled by codifiers of ideologies to legitimize certain political interests and to defend or challenge dominant political power structures.”[11] Neoliberialism functions like an ideology by mapping people’s notions about the world in which they live.

More specifically, Steger and Roy define the ideology of neoliberalism as an economic ideology. It presents “idealized images of a consumerist, free-market world” as indispensable for creating a better world. Neoliberalism as an economist ideology pervades the public discourse in many parts of the world. Its principles of free market capitalism that consists of global trade and financial markets, worldwide flows of goods, and services and labor are central everywhere.[12] Global power elites play key roles in the pervasive presence of neoliberalism in the world. These elites are “codifiers of neoliberalism” and

include “managers of executives of large transnational cooperations” as well as lobbyists, journalists, specialists in public relations, intellectuals, entertainers, politicians, and state bureaucrats.[13]

Second, according to Steger and Roy, neoliberalism is a mode of governance in line with Michel Foucault’s concept of “governmentalities.” This notion refers to “modes of governance based on particular premises, logics, and power relations.”[14] Steger and Roy also explain that neoliberal governmentality is “rooted in entrepreneurial values such as competitiveness, self-interest, and decentralization. It celebrates individual empowerment and the devolution of central state power to smaller regulated units.”[15] The focus on individualism and the rejection of the common good enacted by governmental power ensures that neoliberal individuals do not pursue the public good, justice, and welfare for all. Rather, they bring technologies from business and commerce into every other areas of society. Accordingly, the pursuit of profit becomes the main driving force also in government-run programs, such as social security and related social programs.[16] The neoliberal mode of governance transfers the principles of the market, as practiced in the business and corporate world, to all the other spheres of society. They include healthcare and universities.[17] One particular model of public administration, called the New Public Management (NPM), follows neoliberal practices from business companies. The NPM model focuses on leadership and measurable results. For instance, the NPM model has led to the relentless emphasis of learning outcomes in educational settings.[18] In the NPM model the role of the state is reduced to controlling those outcomes. As a result, university teachers and professors are constantly required to document their work results with often very cumbersome and tedious computer reporting programs. Thus, when neoliberalism as a mode of governance moves into academia, the neoliberal university becomes part of what Michael Power calls “the audit society.”[19]

Third, according to Steger and Roy, neoliberalism is “a policy package” that consists of a set of policies. The policies include the deregulation of the economy, the liberalization of trade and industry, and the privatization of enterprises that have been traditionally owned and run by the government, often on the regional and municipal levels. When neoliberalism becomes a policy package, the policy results often include tax cuts for private businesses, corporations, and high-income earners. At the same time, neoliberal policies reduce welfare programs and social services, downsize the government, create hostility toward unions, and lead to the establishment of think tanks, as new political institutions and cultural organizations reproduce and promote

neoliberalism.[20] The three dimensions of neoliberalism as an ideology, a mode of governance, and a policy package are increasingly present in most institutions and organizations in European societies, including in institutions of higher education.

What is the Neoliberal University?

Nowadays, the phrase of "the neoliberal university" is an established term, although it does not have a generally accepted definition.[21] It can be used in the singular as a model for those universities that represent alternatives to traditional university models such as the Humboldt model for modern universities. The phrase "the neoliberal university" can also be used in the plural when it refers to actual universities. Kadri Aavik, Birgit Riegraf, and Blanka Nyklova define neoliberal universities in the following way when they explain:

> [Neoliberal universities] function according to market principles and a neoliberal logic by adopting new policies and regulations on national and transnational levels of decision-making. The administratively implemented reforms have also often been accompanied by a drive to change the self-perception and behaviour of individual academics and of academic communities, i.e. to change the very embodiment and performance of academic subjects. This has involved the introduction and implementation of market principles in higher education. In particular, the pressure comes from highlighting individual achievement and valuing competition between academics and between universities, while rejecting solidarity and collegiality as core values of academic work. The collective dimensions of human activity, such as research, are downplayed.[22]

The description of neoliberal universities as market-driven, individualistic, and highly competitive places fit all three dimensions of Roy's and Steger's definition of neoliberalism as an ideology, a mode of governance, and a policy package. It becomes obvious to globalized scholars that most neoliberal universities around the world operate in similar ways, although local varieties exist abundantly.[23] The ideology of neoliberalism pervades public discourse in almost all spheres of society even though universities are still places where critical studies of ideologies can take place. Obviously, feminist scholarship, including feminist biblical scholarship, must play a significant role in such critical work.

The emergence of the neoliberal university has led to a new academic field, called "critical university studies."[24] Scholarship in this new field investigates the political economy of knowledge production within and outside the neoliberal university. As an interdisciplinary academic field, it asks what "the

transformations in the governance of science means for academic research and knowledge production as well as teaching and instruction."[25] The influence of neoliberalism within universities has also led to research by geopolitically and academically differently located scholars who investigate the nature and purpose of universities and what the roles of academia are in today's society. Usually, such scholarship regards neoliberalism as a threat to the most basic values of academic education and research.[26] The proponents of critical university studies also consider their research as vitally important to democratic society.

In some works criticizing the neoliberal university researchers define "the university as an autonomous world with its own logic and its own system of norms that are not the same as those of ideology, the market, or usefulness for the state."[27] Some thinkers find this notion of the university represented in the current models of higher education,[28] as for instance in liberal-arts colleges in the U.S.A.[29] or the Humboldt-university tradition in Germany.[30] Other critics of the neoliberal university emphasize the vital functions of universities in democratic societies. Accordingly, many critics of the neoliberal university consider research in the humanities and the social sciences an indispensable self-reflection to make democratic governance structures successful and lasting.[31] Yet most importantly, neoliberal modes of operation and organization of higher-education institutions are viewed as only one option among others in these studies. Alternative ways of researching and teaching emerge as viable ways of university life.

Research in critical university studies raises two important points for feminist studies in general and feminist biblical studies in particular. First, scholars of critical university studies insist that the neoliberal university rejects "solidarity and collegiality as core values of academic work" and always downplays "the collective dimensions of human activity, such as research."[32] This point is significant because it pertains directly to feminist scholarship in any field, including feminist biblical studies. It challenges feminist biblical scholars to maintain and even to (re)-create genuinely collective scholarship that promotes collegiality and solidarity, including solidarity among women and others working for gender justice outside the walls of the neoliberal university. If neoliberalism promotes individuality and isolated forms of work, feminist scholarship ought to foster collaboration, connections, and the collegial spirit in research, writing, and teaching.

Second, Aavik, Riegraf, and Nyklova highlight the self-disciplinary changes required by the neoliberal academic subject to succeed in the neoliberal

university. They state:

> The administratively implemented reforms have also often been accompanied by a drive to change the self-perception and behaviour of individual academics and of academic communities, i.e. to change the very embodiment and performance of academic subjects.[33]

In other words, individual researchers are implicated in the operations of the neoliberal university. The sociologist Jeff Hearn further develops this idea when he connects the organizational changes of academia with the construction of the individual scholar. From a Foucauldian perspective, at stake is not only that individual scholars must adjust to precarious working conditions. They also must internalize the ideals of the neoliberal university and be formed by them on a deep level. They have to become neoliberal academic subjects.[34] This assimilation constitutes a tremendous challenge to feminist biblical scholars because it raises the question about what kind of academic subjects feminist exegetes want to be. The question is whether neoliberalism changes feminists so much so that our feminism disappears as we become assimilated neoliberal subjects. Will our feminism become neoliberal and how can feminists resist without moving into intellectual and institutional isolation?

In sum, the neoliberal university implements modes of governance and policy packages that create precarious working conditions for all scholars, except for those most assimilated to the demands of the neoliberal university. Feminist scholars, too, live in this conflict that places the values of the neoliberal university before the flourishing of the common good, human life, and society in general. Unsurprisingly, then, feminist research does not appear on the top of the neoliberal university agenda. The lack of appreciation and support for the humanities and even the social sciences includes feminist biblical studies. What are feminist Bible scholars going to do about this dire situation?

Feminist Biblical Scholarship and Neoliberalism in Exegetical Scholarship

A word of caution: I am well aware that this section is written from my perspective as a feminist biblical scholar from the global North. It is likely that a feminist biblical scholar from the global South, who participates in church work toward social justice and perhaps supports poor women suffering from the consequences of neoliberal global capitalism, would offer a different analysis,

perhaps including feminist interpretations of biblical texts on social justice. Yet I decided to examine several feminist publications in biblical studies that critically interrogate neoliberal tendencies and strategies in biblical scholarship. The publications indicate the increasing popularity among biblical scholars and lay readers to reference the Bible with neoliberal ideas in mind. This exegetical situation is relevant for religious institutions, culture, and society in Europe because it normalizes neoliberal thought.

Several feminist investigations on neoliberal appropriations of the Bible stand out. One of the earliest inquiries comes from the feminist Hebrew Bible and Jewish studies scholar, Esther Fuchs. She observed a neoliberal turn in feminist biblical scholarship already in 2008.[35] Exposing neoliberalism as an ideology in feminist biblical publications, Fuchs critically examines the neoliberal assumptions of several feminist studies on the Hebrew Bible. She claims that the interpretations advance neoliberal feminism even though the authors do not state so explicitly. Fuchs shows that well-known feminist Hebrew Bible scholars, such as Ilana Pardes, Susan Ackerman, and Tikva Frymer-Kensky rely on neoliberal strategies of interpretation. They focus on women's experiences, thereby essentializing gender. Moreover, they do not challenge the academic framework within which historical reconstructions of women highlight women's strength, power, autonomy, social status, and cultural contributions. Thus, they present the category of "woman" as a naturalized, biological category that regards gender as a stable and unchanging essence or even reality. Most importantly, neoliberal feminist exegetes assume the principles of Western and European liberalism and humanism which enables neoliberal feminist interpreters to separate power from knowledge. Their interpretations present themselves as innocent readings about women with the goal to hold up universal truth about women and men, or humanity in general. Fuchs asserts that these kinds of biblical readings seek mere inclusion into the exegetical status quo, as their authors present their interpretations as descriptive, objective, and value-neutral readings of the Bible. Simultaneously, Fuchs charges that neoliberal feminist exegetes omit any references to feminist genealogies of knowledge and feminist ways of knowing. They defer to the "fathers of the field" and disregard their own indebtedness to feminist mothers.

Another examination on neoliberal tendencies in biblical interpretations comes from the feminist Hebrew Bible scholar, Susanne Scholz. In a book chapter, entitled "Essentializing 'Woman': Three Neoliberal Strategies in Christian Right's Interpretations on Women in the Bible,"[36] Scholz takes Fuchs's essay as her point of departure for analyzing Christian Right readings on biblical

women. She observes that "[a]s Christian Right interpreters have intensified their systematic exploration of the Bible, they have increasingly become interested in the study of biblical women."[37] Relying on the neoliberal strategies identified by Fuchs, Scholz analyzes popular and widely distributed Christian Right interpretations on biblical women, published in the United States. Scholz shows that Fuchs's critique of feminist biblical scholarship as neoliberal appropriations also occurs in these popular treatises. Most importantly, the deconstruction of the neoliberal interpretations of biblical women demonstrates the fallacy of the common belief that Christian Right readings merely present literal, common sense, and straightforward exegesis of biblical texts. Thus, both feminist scholarly and Christian Right readings of the Bible endorse neoliberal ideology as natural, unchangeable, and omnipresent.[38]

In addition to investigating the influence of neoliberal ideology on Christian interpretations, Scholz also considers the consequences of neoliberal governmentalities and policies in queer and masculinity biblical studies.[39] After mentioning briefly the well-known realities of budget cuts in colleges and universities as well as the difficult situations of the humanities in general, Scholz highlights the "ongoing marginalization of feminist biblical work in institutions of higher education." She asserts that the neoliberal sidelining has dampened "the powerful energies that were set free in the 1970s."[40] She reminds readers that the neoliberal hegemony in global economies have affected institutions of higher education globally. In her view, this development has caused "considerable intellectual and economic difficulties for progressive academics"[41] who pursue progressive research agendas, such as feminist biblical scholarship.[42] In short, Scholz puts the neoliberal university, its mode of governance, and its policy package on the agenda of feminist, queer, and masculinity biblical studies.

Yet another feminist Bible scholar deliberates on the impact of neoliberalism on feminist studies. The New Testament exegete, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, maintains that neoliberalism envisions a new world order on the national and international levels, characterized by inequality, competition, market discipline, law and order, and public austerity.[43] To Schüssler Fiorenza, feminist biblical scholarship has its proper place at the intersection of scholarship, progressive (Christian) theologies of liberation, and movements for social justice that include gender justice. The renowned feminist Bible scholar maintains that feminist biblical scholarship is "a radical democratic critical discourse of conscientization, self-respect, and transformation."[44] Consequently, feminist

biblical scholars must participate in movements for social justice.[45] They need to critically interrogate neoliberal leanings in academia and society. They also ought to offer alternative feminist visions for theological and religious discourse as well as for human life on earth.

More specifically, Schüssler Fiorenza draws attention to the consequences of neoliberalism in the academy. She refers to the particular problems of scholarly communication in neoliberal contexts in which publications constitute the most basic forms of scholarly exchange although publishing contract decisions are based more and more on the profit margins of publishers than on scholarly or pedagogical content. Accordingly, European publishers often ask scholars to pay for getting books and articles published. Books are getting so expensive that students cannot afford them and academic libraries need to constantly increase their acquisition budgets. Schüssler Fiorenza thus observes that the neoliberal impact on scholarly research, publishing, and teaching makes it increasingly difficult to create a "feminist culture of communication between the generations of feminist biblical scholars."[46]

These relatively few currently existing references to the neoliberal impact on feminist biblical studies need to be further expanded. We need to explore the following issues that the current generations of feminist Bible scholars face: how do biblical texts, biblical motifs, and biblical themes appear in neoliberal settings today? How do neoliberals or their opponents use the Bible in political debates or for political gain? How is biblical scholarship recited or ignored in neoliberal contexts? Who is mentioned as authoritative for biblical meanings in those contexts, and why?[47] Perhaps feminist studies on the reception history of the Bible will gain increasing significance and popularity, as contemporary culture represents a huge neoliberal arena of expressing and articulating biblical ideas in ever surprising ways and formats.[48] In sum, feminist Bible scholars have begun studying the impact of neoliberalism on feminist biblical studies. Surely, feminist exegetes will have to move deeper into this area of investigation in the foreseeable future.

On the Future of European Feminist Biblical Studies in the Neoliberal Era

Some final considerations about remedying the neoliberal conditions for European feminist Bible scholarship shall conclude this essay. As mentioned

previously, several scholars have published their research in various fields on the neoliberal university and its consequences for feminist and gender studies. These works also consider the intellectual welfare of scholars who assert feminist research agendas in a system based on values in conflict to feminist values. These studies investigate neoliberal processes within different geopolitical contexts and combine them with personal reflections on the working conditions of feminist scholars in neoliberal universities.

In my view, similar books and journal articles written by feminist biblical scholars would play an important role in understanding the challenges of neoliberalism and the neoliberal university for specifically feminist Bible scholars. Such research could be done within a collective process, in which scholars would interact with each other in researching and writing on the topic. The result would be anthologies characterized by collegiality and solidarity. These kinds of books would exemplify the kind of resistance needed to develop scholarly alternative practices and theories to the neoliberal university.[49] Importantly, such work would need to be done in cooperation with feminist and gender scholars from other academic disciplines to broaden the reach of everybody's insights and readership.

Several research topics come to mind. One research topic could investigate how the Bologna Process has shaped feminist biblical scholarship across several European countries. Since the Bologna Process includes countries with different university systems, a critical analysis of the Bologna Process would certainly lead to different evaluations from variously located European feminist Bible scholars. Different ideas for resisting neoliberalism in higher education might emerge in light of different European university systems. The aim would be the promotion of feminist scholarship and teaching to strengthen democracy and gender justice in society.

Such interdisciplinary approaches to feminist biblical research by scholars who are located at European neoliberal universities would uncover the institutional and intellectual complexities of the different situations. Such studies would show how neoliberal forces in various university systems and societies interact with other factors that differ widely in Europe, such as the status of religion in society. For instance, the gains from localized investigations into particular geopolitical contexts becomes obvious in Scholz's study of Christian Right interpretations of the Bible in the United States. Vander Stichele's discussion on the gendering of New Testament Studies in the Netherlands clarifies the institutional situation of women's and gender studies in theology departments related to the secularization process in the Netherlands, the market-

driven business model practiced by Dutch universities, and the hostility of the so-called restoration movements in both Dutch Protestant and Catholic churches to feminist and gender studies.[50] Many other localized studies are needed to gain detailed understanding about the specific circumstances in European universities.

The publications by Scholz and Vander Stichele could serve as models for similar research projects that would examine the impact of neoliberalism on the academic field of biblical studies. Such studies might evoke questions about the role of feminist biblical scholarship in relation to the academy, religious organizations, and society. They would certainly illustrate that academic neoliberalism and conservative, even reactionary, movements in religious life pose considerable threats to feminist biblical scholarship in Europe and elsewhere. Yet the studies by Scholz and Vander Stichele also suggest that such research ought to be geopolitically specific. The neoliberal realities look differently in the United States where the Christian Right is an important political factor than in a secularized European country, such as the Netherlands. Still, it will be important for feminist Bible scholars to look for commonalities while recognizing geopolitical, institutional, religious, cultural, and perhaps even political differences. As feminist Bible scholars, we ought to define our work in opposition to neoliberalism while we also recognize the global processes in which all feminist exegetes research, write, and teach. We ought to remember that proponents of neoliberalism often present neoliberalism as the only viable and productive option available today. They suggest that nobody can or should resist it. For instance, already the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher repeatedly said in the 1980s that "there is no alternative"[51] and the Swedish people know the phrase, describing neoliberal politics in the 1990s, as "den enda vägen," which in English means "the only way."[52] Feminist biblical scholarship thus ought to present alternative ways of interpreting the Bible and living in the world today.

In conclusion, feminist biblical scholarship plays an important role in resisting neoliberal claims that there is no alternative to neoliberal modes of seeing the world. History shows that society changes constantly and change is the foundation of historical developments. Feminist research demonstrates that gender, too, is expressed differently in past and present societies. Feminist biblical scholars, thus, know that alternative modes of human life have always existed, and this neoliberal age is not an exception. We ought to refuse deterministic claims of neoliberalism and instead affirm the feminist conviction that alternative ways of thinking and living are possible through collective

feminist work. European feminist Bible scholars need to build biblical research and teaching on this firm conviction, and resist neoliberal demands of our time.

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[1] The quotes are from the website of the publishing company presenting Rachel Thwaites and Amy Pressland, eds., *Being an Early Career Feminist Academic: Experiences and Challenges* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). This book is a collection of case studies from different countries and academic disciplines addressing the consequences of neoliberalism in academia. The volume includes personal witnesses and research studies. For the website, see https://www.palgrave.com/gp/book/9781137543240 [accessed January 31, 2019].

[2] "Sorbonne Joint Declaration: Joint Declaration on Harmonisation of the Architecture of the European Higher Education System." Available at http://www.mab.hu/web/doc/kulfold/Sorbonne_declaration.pdf [accessed June 7, 2019].

[3] For information about the Bologna Process see the official web site: https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/higher-education/bologna-process-and-european-higher-education-area_en.

[4] See, e.g., David Palfreyman, "The Legal Impact of Bologna Implementation: Exploring Criticisms and Critiques of the Bologna Process," *Education and the Law* 20.3 (2008): 249–57.

[5] Angeliki Alvanoudi, "Teaching Gender in the Neoliberal University," in Daniela Gronold, Brigitte Hipfl, and Linda Lund Pedersen, *Teaching with the Third Wave: New Feminists' Explorations of Teaching and Institutional Contexts* (Teaching with Gender: European Women's Studies in International and Interdisciplinary Classrooms 4), Stockholm: Centre for Gender Studies: Stockholm University, 2009, 37–54, here pp. 38–39: available as:

https://www.erg.su.se/polopoly_fs/1.39112.1320403013!/Teaching_With_The_Third_Wave.pdf [accessed June 6, 2019].

[6] So, e.g., Kadri Aavik, Birgit Riegraf, and Blanka Nyklova, "The Neoliberal/ising University at the Intersection of Gender and Place," *Gender and Research* 18.1 (2017): 6; Jeff Hearn, "Neoliberal Universities, Patriarchies, Masculinities and Myself: Trans-national Personal Reflections on and from the Global North," in *Gender in/and the Neoliberal University*, 16–41. For Hearn's definition of neoliberalism, see 18–21. Hearn lists several publications for further reading on the relationship between neoliberalism and the academy. The journal is available online at https://www.genderonline.cz/en/issue/42-volume-18-number-1-2017-gender-in-and-the-neoliberal-university-transnational-processes-and-localised-impacts, May 31, 2019. For a study of the intellectual history of neoliberalism, see Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

[7] Hearn, "Neoliberal Universities," 19.

[8] Manfred B. Steger and Ravi K. Ray, *Neoliberalism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). The authors work in the field "Global Studies" with scholarly expertise in political and social theory, peace studies, international politics (Steger), and economic policy and public policy (Roy).

[9] Ibid., 11.

[10] Ibid.,11.

[11] Ibid. All quotes in this paragraph are from this page.

[12] Ibid.,11–12.

[13] Ibid., 11.

[14] Ibid., 12.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] The first process is often called "marketization" and the second process is called "management."

[18] For a detailed presentation of New Public Management, see Steger and Roy, *Neoliberalism*, 12–13. For references to works on "New Public Management" within the university, see Johan Östling, *Humboldt and the Modern German University: An Intellectual History* (Lund: Lund University Press, 2018), 211 n. 13.

[19] Michael Power, The Audit Society: Rituals of Verification (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). See also Sven Widmalm, "Kundskapssamhället," in *Det hotade universitetet*, ed. Shirin Ahlbäck Öberg et al. (Stockholm: Dialogos, 2016), 31.

[20] Steger and Roy, *Neoliberalism*, 14.

[21] See Aavik, Riegraf, and Nyklova, "Neolibera/lising," 6.

[22] Ibid., 2–3.

[23] See, e.g., the case studies in *Gender in/and the Neoliberal University*. The cases relate to different countries, including the Czech Republic, South Africa, Estonia, Germany, Sweden, Finland, and the U.K.

[24] See, e.g., the series "Critical University Studies" that is published by Palgrave Macmillan Publishing House featuring many important books on the topic: https://www.palgrave.com/gp/series/14707. See also the following blog website on critical university studies: http://www.radicalteacher.net/criticaluniversitystudies/. See also Jeffrey J. Williams, "Deconstructing Academe: The Birth of Critical University Studies," *Chronicle of Higher Education* (February 19, 2012):

https://www.chronicle.com/article/An-Emerging-Field-Deconstructs/130791.

[25] Aavik, Riegraf, and Nyklova, "Neolibera/lising," 2. The editorial includes a valuable bibliography.

[26] To take an example from my own country which has been important for my work with this essay, see Shirin Ahlbäck Öberg et al., *Det hotade universitetet* (Stockholm: Dialogos, 2016). The translation of the title into English is "The Endangered University." For a debate in Germany that illustrates the complex situation, such as the history and ideals of the German universities beyond neoliberal influences, see Östling, *Humboldt and the Modern University*. References to the neoliberal situation at German universities appear throughout the book on pp. 95, 211, 220–21, 230, and 232.

[27] Östling, *Humboldt and the Modern University*, 249.

[28] The liberal arts model of the United States and the Humboldt tradition at German universities also appear in the discussion by Östling, *Humboldt and the Modern University*, 248.

[29] For an influential example, see Martha C. Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Princeton, NJ / Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016). The Princeton University Press published the book already in 2010.

[30] Östling, *Humboldt and the Modern University*, 248, discusses Humboldt and the Humboldt tradition within the German debate about universities as a defense to acquire "knowledge that goes beyond vocational programmes and instrumental usefulness" and of academic studies which "promotes civic and human development."

[31] Jonna Bornemark, *Det omätbaras renässans: En uppgörelse med pedanternas herravälde* (Stockholm: Volante, 2018), 273–4.

[32] The journal, *Gender in/and the Neoliberal University*, maintains that feminist/gender perspectives ought to be integrated into critical university studies. In the included case studies, feminist/gender theories provide analytical tools for understanding various aspects of "the neoliberal university." Several case studies also focus on the conditions of feminist/gender studies within neoliberal universities. In addition, the editorial comments indicate that the editors of the journal worked collectively on the theme issue, in contrast to the guiding principles of the neoliberal university.

[33] Aavik, Riegraf, and Nyklova, "Neolibera/lising," 6.

[34] Hearn, "Neoliberal Universities," 19–21.

[35] Esther Fuchs, "Reclaiming the Hebrew Bible for Women: The Neoliberal Turn in Contemporary Feminist Scholarship," *Journal of the Feminist Study in Religion* 24.2 (2008): 45–65. The essay is included in Esther Fuchs, *Feminist Theory and the Bible: Interrogating the Sources* (Feminist Studies and Sacred Texts; Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017).

[36] Susanne Scholz, *Introducing the Women's Hebrew Bible: Feminism, Gender Justice, and the Study of the Old Testament* (second rev. and exp. ed.; London / New York, NY: T&T Clark Bloomsbury, 2017).

[37] Ibid., 149.

[38] Another feminist publication that includes a critical study of neoliberalism is Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ed., *Feminist Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century: Scholarship and Movement* (The Bible and Women 9:1; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014). In the introduction to this volume, Schüssler Fiorenza includes a section on "Religious Symbol-Systems: Biblical Imagination and Neoliberal Globalization." However, Schüssler Fiorenza merely mentions neoliberal globalization as a context for contemporary feminist biblical scholarship but does not further develop the issue. The chapter states on page 17 that feminist biblical scholarship can support either the forces of "economic and cultural global dehumanization" or global justice. In the same volume Susanne Scholz also draws attention to the marginalization of feminist biblical scholars and to Christian Right interpretations on biblical women.

[39] Susanne Scholz, “Denaturalizing the Gender Binary: Queer and Masculinity Studies as Integral to Feminist Biblical Studies,” chap. in *Introducing the Women’s Hebrew Bible*, 127–48.

[40] Susanne Scholz, “From the ‘Women’s Bible’ to the ‘Women’s Bible’: The History of Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible,” chap. in *Introducing the Women’s Hebrew Bible*, 40.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid., 40–1.

[43] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Feminist Remappings in Times of Neoliberalism,” in *The Bible and Feminism: Remapping the Field*, ed. Yvonne Sherwood with the assistance of Anna Fisk (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 171.

[44] Ibid., 170.

[45] Ibid., 170–1.

[46] Ibid., 175–7. See also the discussion by Yvonne Sherwood about the consequences of the neoliberal ideology on several contributors to her anthology; see Yvonne Sherwood, “Acknowledgments,” in *Bible and Feminism*, ed. Sherwood, ix (not paginated).

[47] For a beginning conversation on these questions, see James Crossley, *Jesus in an Age of Neoliberalism: Quests, Scholarship and Ideology* (Durham, NC: Acumen, 2013); James Crossley, *Cults, Martyrs and Good Samaritans: Religion in Contemporary English Political Discourse* (London: Pluto, 2018); James Crossley, “The End of Reception History, a Grand Narrative for Biblical Studies and the Neoliberal Bible,” in *Reception History and Biblical Studies: Theory and Practice*, ed. Emma England and William John Lyons (Scriptural Traces: Critical Perspectives on the Reception and the Influence of the Bible 6; London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 45–59.

[48] For such a study that, however, does not mention the concept of neoliberalism, see, e.g., Katie B. Edwards, *Admen and Eve: The Bible in Contemporary Advertising* (The Bible in the Modern World 48; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2012).

[49] For an example of such collective work, see Aavik, Riegraf, and Nyklova, “Neolibera/lising,” 3–6.

[50] Caroline Vander Stichele, “Is Dona Quixote Fighting Windmills? Gendering New Testament Studies in the Netherlands.” *lectio difficilior: European Electronic Journal for Feminist Exegesis* (1/2013): http://www.lectio.unibe.ch/13_1/vander_stichele_caroline_is_dona_quixote_fighting_windmills.html. Her essay also illuminates the complex situation about the difficulties of, for instance, maintaining biblical studies as an academic discipline when departments of theology are redefined into departments of religious studies, or the fact that many Dutch exegetes still understand biblical scholarship as historical-critical work under the exclusion of feminist and gender hermeneutical perspectives.

[51] For a reference to the slogan, see Steger and Roy, *Neoliberalism*, 21.

[52] Kjell Östberg and Jenny Andersson, *Sveriges historia 1965–2012* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 2013), 374–97.

CHAPTER 14

NEOLIBERALISM AND QUEER THEORY IN BIBLICAL READINGS

TERESA J. HORNSBY

A direct, inextricable relationship exists between capitalism, the gender binary, and the sexualities of human beings. As a manifestation of Foucauldian "power," capitalism creates every aspect of "what it means to be human." In other words, each and every perception of what is "normal," "appropriate," "acceptable," "perverse," "bizarre," or "fringe" is conjured up, sustained, and maintained through a deeply integrated economic system of merit that is always in flux. In the current economic system, a particularly nasty strain of neoliberalism, the essential ingredients for a robust capitalism are churned out at lightning speed: inequality, xenophobia, and a combative binary worldview. On the one hand, in some sectors, binaries are dissolving; for example, a heightened acceptance of trans people, interracial relationships, and healthcare and civil benefits for same-sex couples. On the other hand, an amplified and vitriolic backlash takes place against the same groups: "bathroom legislation" against trans people in the United States, courts granting the rights of Christians to discriminate against LGBT people, and TRAP laws impeding women from access to safe and legal abortion. What is happening is not so much a dissolution of binary thinking but a thickening of the demarcation between opposites. In other words, a middle position between the polar opposites of acceptance and exclusion has been erased. The following essay explains how neoliberal economics produces inequality and simultaneously weakens and bolsters a gendered binary. It also elaborates on the contributions of the Bible and the ways in which "theologies of

suffering" support a neoliberal quest for submissive and suffering bodies. Special attention is given to several prophetic texts and Judges 7. The essay concludes with a reflection on biblical interpretation as a producer of submissive and dependent bodies in service to neoliberal concerns.

Neoliberalism and Neoliberal Capitalism

The essence of "neoliberalism" as an ideology can be described as a utopic vision, one that is vastly different from neoliberal capitalism. As David Harvey writes, "We have to pay careful attention . . . to the tension between the theory of neoliberalism and the actual pragmatics of neoliberalism."[1] Its intent seems to be noble: the quest for truth, humanity, compassion, equality, justice, and liberty. Neoliberalist ideals move toward a full realization of "Truth" by seeking community consensus. Its limitless scope of social institutions renders it postmodern. It does not distinguish between the political, the economic, the social, or the religious. Perhaps the most articulate formation of neoliberalism would be found in Jürgen Habermas's work on discourse ethics. In the Kantian chasm of "whence truth?" the absence of a cosmological source of values ("goodness," "morality," "virtues," or "truth") is filled with a system referred to as "communicative rationality." Habermas posits that "truth" is something that can be found in communal collaboration. It is precisely the transitory nature of identity that rightly complicates (and sabotages) the merging of neoliberalism and economics.

Neoliberal ideals target virtuous truths through an ephemeral coming together of fleeting identities, with a dismissal of an ontological mover or a central authority. At the same time neoliberal capitalists seek an unfettered system that is void of government interference to generate profit. This form of capitalism emphasizes the rights of property owners, unfettered trade, and free enterprise, along with the dogma that a free market is self-regulatory, replacing a state regulator with the property owner or CEO. The emphasis is neoliberal only in its refusal to recognize the state as a regulator, and in its commandeering of a postmodernist rejection of essentialist categories of social strata. In a neoliberal capitalist venture the ideal is profit. Feminist historian Johanna Oksala explains this dynamic in this statement:

> [Neoliberalism] is not reducible to a set of economic policies such as limiting the regulation of capital, maximizing corporate profits, and dismantling the welfare state. As a form of governmentality neoliberalism extends beyond economic policy, or even the economic domain as

> traditionally conceived. A fundamental feature of neoliberal governmentality is not just the eradication of market regulation, for example, but the eradication of the border between the social and the economic: market rationality—cost-benefit calculation—must be disseminated to all institutions and social practices.[2]

In neoliberalism, the individual should have absolute freedom, and the concept of "freedom" is crucial. Similarly, Harvey summarizes Karl Polanyi when he reminds his readers that freedom, like everything else, is complex and without assigned value; along with "good" freedoms one must accept the "bad" ones as well:

> In a complex society . . . the meaning of freedom becomes as contradictory and as fraught as its incitements to action are compelling. There are [according to Polanyi] two kinds of freedom, one good, the other bad. Among the latter he listed "the freedom to exploit one's fellows, or the freedom to make inordinate gains without commensurable service to the community, the freedom to keep technological inventions from being used for public benefit, or the freedom to profit from public calamities secretly engineered for private advantage."[3]

This final "bad" freedom is indeed ominous. Harvey, quoting Polyani, then states:

> "The market economy in which these freedoms throve also produced freedoms we prize highly. Freedom of conscience, freedom of speech, freedom of meeting, freedom of association, freedom to choose one's own job." While we may "cherish these freedoms for their own sake" they were to a large extent "by-products of the same economy that was also responsible for the evil freedoms."[4]

In other words, the cherished freedoms are folded into the essentials of neoliberal economics; they consist of free enterprise and private property. State regulatory measures and those who back them are proclaimed to be against freedom, liberty, and justice. Those who decry the inevitable circumstances of the "bad" freedoms are branded as traitors, terrorists, and "queer." Inequalities are not merely tolerated but required for the very existence of neoliberal capitalism. The basic idea is this: regardless of the goods or modes of production, such as agricultural, industrial, or electronic, competition forms the bedrock of capitalism which, in turn, assumes inequality. Expanding on this principle in his lectures at the College de France, Michel Foucault explains that competition is not something that happens "naturally." It must be cultivated and nurtured to maturity to assure a successful and thriving economy.[5] Thus, in a neoliberal capitalist system, any stop-gap regulations put into place by social, governmental, or moral institutions to level the playing field are seen as threatening to the greater good, as determined by neoliberal capitalist mores. In short, the "bad" freedoms are not by-products of an effective and healthy

neoliberal economy; they are necessary.

In light of this, neoliberal capitalism produces and sustains inequalities, hierarchies, and binary oppositions. Yet it also relies upon an ideology of decentralization. It wants decentralized communication for unencumbered flow so that corporations enjoy the freedoms that have been traditionally reserved for individuals. It ensures that "identities" become vague and ambiguous. This ambiguity, in turn, creates an oddity: while binaries must remain strong for capitalism to work, neoliberalism needs ambiguous identities and blurred boundaries to move seamlessly between the social and private spheres, between personal and private, between corporate and individual, and of course, between right and wrong.

As one might suspect, feminist critics push back on the "postmodern" bent of neoliberalism as a dissolution of demarcation. As Nancy Fraser and Hester Eisenstein articulate so well, neoliberalism and postmodernism render all forms of social protest ineffective. Without an identity, how do under-represented groups organize? In other words, how does one participate in identity politics if there is no identity? Oksala articulates this dilemma when she states:

> Hester Eisenstein for example, has argued that the postmodern turn in women's studies scholarship in the 1980s, with its emphasis on discourse and its distrust of grand narratives, undermined a systematic analysis of the capitalist system. The contemporaneous global rise of neoliberalism as the leading political and economic paradigm implies that feminism must now turn away from poststructuralist and postmodern analyses that focus on individual acts of resistance and back toward a structural analysis of global capitalism.[6]

The problem is that neoliberal thought does not allow for stable identities. Its ideas acquiesce to the denial of personal and social distinctions, and seek solidarity through common oppressions, interests, or benefits. However fleeting, neoliberal thought reinscribes the particulars that render some bodies inferior. For neoliberal power to thrive, it must dissolve individual identities, by appealing to broader and more abstract categories, such as "American" or "Christian" or "the middle class." Furthermore, it must strengthen, to the point of being indestructible, the bedrock binary of "us" versus "them." Binaries, always and no matter the pair, are gendered and hierarchical. The lesser is always coded feminine. The gender binary is the foundation to all other binaries, and hence, to everything. Simply put, the very existence of capitalism rests upon the creation and the preservation of the gender binary.

Neoliberal capitalism is unique because of the way that the capital is produced, as opposed to how change is driven by producing capital.[7] It is neither a new capitalism nor a "post capitalism." Rather, at its core capitalism is a static

concept. It must produce profit and is only dynamic in how and why it produces profit. The distinctiveness of neoliberal capitalism is its exploitation of human beings, which produce enormous profits. The less companies spend on labor costs, the higher their profit margin. While there are arguably more humane and moral ways of creating profit and streamlining labor costs, many transnational manufacturers know that they can pay extremely low wages with no fringe benefits to "particular types" of people. Historically, these people were mainly women, peoples of the southern hemisphere, and/or non-white individuals, although fluctuation exists that depends on extenuating circumstances, such as class stratification, religious affiliations, or ethnicity. This type of capitalism requires the covert production of people whom the mainstream considers as "other." In other words, the perception of otherness must be both external and internal. Individuals must accept that their value is no more than what the status quo deems it to be.[8] Thus, the dominant narrative defines those who are not "normal" as the "abnormal" or "queer." In turn, those people must accept and even desire this social status.

In the past two centuries, capitalism has changed; industrialized cultures have experienced an acceleration of what Harvey refers to as the "compression of space and time."[9] The change is due to a radical shift from the maximum speed of a horse-drawn carriage and wind-driven ships to the eight-hundred-mph thrust of the modern jet and instantaneous appearances made possible by the microchip and the internet. The development of electronic commerce is a manifestation of postmodern capitalism; a capitalism borne of human experiences in a compressed space and time. One stark way that postmodern capitalism differs from an industrial-based, or Fordian, capitalism is that, the latter system is not dependent on a manufacture of "real" commodities; the financial system rests on the production of non-tangibles. We are experiencing a Baudrillardian production of signs–images rather than commodities.[10] Harvey explains:

> The interweaving of simulacra in daily life brings together different worlds (of commodities) in the same space and time. But it does so in such a way as to conceal almost perfectly any trace of origin, of the labour processes that produced them, or of the social relations implicated in their production. The simulacra can in turn become the reality.[11]

Not only does neoliberal capitalism produce invisible commodities, it hides effectively the labor processes that are necessary to produce them.

This radical shift in constructed desire accompanies the turn to a postmodern or simulacra capitalism. Rosemary Hennessy recognizes this fact when she comments:

> [T]he dominant discourses of sexual identity in over industrialized sectors, spun across national lines through media and travel industries, seem to be changing, albeit in uneven ways. … The network of equations among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire on which normative heterosexuality as a matrix of intelligibility came to depend under Fordism is being disrupted.[12]

As Hennessy infers, normative heterosexuality, the assumed and prescribed way of life in Western post-industrial societies, has increasingly been challenged and expanded to include various and diverse forms of sexual practices. As electronic commerce becomes principal within postmodern capitalism, power no longer needs the countless bodies that industrial capitalism did in the production of physical commodities. In this shift to the production of "simulacra," power needs subservient bodies that work independently and without external supervision. Theoretically, for power to police these new bodies, it must produce different sexual and gender normatives. Compulsory heterosexuality produces those physical bodies. Yet, as the needs of power in capitalism change, as populations grow and mix, and as technology reduces the need for sexual reproduction, greater submission to power becomes necessary. In other words, fewer bodies are needed, but those bodies must serve selflessly and partly independent of external regulation because commerce no longer takes place wholly in the public sphere. Bodies must have a heightened and internalized "will to submit." Thus, the production of a compulsory heterosexuality becomes less important.

This shift in capitalism, Harvey's "postmodern condition," rivals the revolutionary global changes of technologies during previous centuries, including linguistic, agricultural, industrial, and nuclear paradigms. Each of these revolutions produced varying constructions of normative desire. For example, when power was more centralized and concentrated, as it was during the industrial era, the boundaries defining normative sexuality were more tightly drawn. That particular construction of desire which was necessary for the rise of post-war and pre-internet monopolistic and colonial capitalism should become rare and perhaps even obsolete because heteronormative desire is no longer essential in the production of capital. During this shift, diverse sexualities and genders are increasingly normalized and accepted in society. As the need for definite sexualities and genders becomes less important for the needs of capitalism, gender fluidity and submission move to the center. Hennessy writes:

> The discrete asymmetrical opposition between male and female is being thrown into question, pressuring the imaginary logic of opposites and sex-gender equations that the prevailing heterogender system once relied on. In the media images generated in overdeveloped capitalist centers especially, more permeable, fluid, ambiguously coded sexual identities are allowed, even promoted.[13]

> Hennessy notes here that the gender binary is relaxed if it is not needed for profit. She also observes that neoliberal capitalism produces bodies congruent with the qualities needed for middle-class professional service workers "who need to be able to carry out multistep operations, manipulate abstract symbols, command the flow of information, and remain flexible enough to recognize new paradigms. Their work requires new affective and physical responses: habitual mobility, adaptability in every undertaking, the ability to navigate among possible alternatives and spaces, and a cultivation of ambivalence as a structure of feeling."[14]

Hennessy makes clear the specific qualifications that neoliberal capitalism needs in exploitable bodies. Further Hennessy rightly recognizes that the economic system under neoliberalism produces the types of bodies it needs to thrive. The example of service workers mirrors the need for self-discipline and submissiveness of workers such as telecommuters. Neoliberal capitalism needs fewer physical bodies and more exploitable and subservient bodies than industrial capitalism. Yet, neoliberal capitalism relies upon a strong hierarchical binary, and the bedrock of any binary is gender. At first glance, there appears to be a contradiction in that neoliberal capitalism does not only survive but thrives in the midst of blurred and even dissolving gender boundaries. But if one takes seriously Judith Butler's claim that the gender binary preexists (and produces) physically gendered bodies, it is clear that what is happening is the perpetual and covert production of the gender binary apart from its connection to a physical body.[15] This irony (that the gender binary is strengthened precisely at the moment that sexualities become less defined) demonstrates that the gender binary does not need physical bodies to flourish. The following analysis indicates that biblical interpreters contribute to this ongoing neoliberal production of the gender binary.

About Neoliberal Contributions to Theologies of Suffering, Submission, and Redemption

The interpretation history that I summarize below reflects a core ideology that values a redemption dependent upon suffering, submission, and vulnerable exposure. As I survey various exegetical conclusions that touch on the notions of suffering and submission, it will be clear how the Bible and its interpreters endorse in complex ways neoliberal economic agendas. They nurture the ideals of suffering, submission, and redemption that are required in the neoliberal age.

At first glance, a heightened production of queer bodies may seem like a

"good" thing. Fewer boundaries produce blurred identities, broadening the possibility for less hegemony and binary opposition. For instance, Marcella Althaus-Reid argues that Christianity needs an indecent rather than a heteronormative theology to serve the needs of all people. By "indecent theology," she refers to:

> Theologians who come out in their pursuit of honesty and engagement with the real and . . . grab a blouse and a lipstick and per/vert the normative socio/theological script, unveil obscenity and are able to see, from sexual stories at the bottom of Rubin's sexual pyramid, tales of God and criticism of political systems.[16]

She claims that the experiences of those sexualities "at the bottom of Rubin's sexual pyramid" are necessary to forge a "real" relationship with the divine, "an encounter to be found at the crossroads of desire, when one dares to leave the ideological order of the heterosexual pervasive normative."[17]

While Althaus-Reid sees the inclusion of non-heteronormative or queer sexualities into central theological discourse as necessary and thus as a positive move forward in dismantling world-wide oppression, I propose that this theoretical inclusion of "indecency" is neoliberal capitalism's use of theology to construct the types of sexual/economic subjects it requires. Biblical interpretation consistently takes a leading role in constructing subservient bodies, normative desires borne of submissive tendencies. Indeed, a submissive impulse lies at the heart of contemporary theologies that emphasize idealized suffering, willful self-sacrifice, glorified humiliation, and romanticized slavery. A look at recent interpretations of selected Hebrew Bible texts reveals a heightened sense of the Freudian "moral masochism" and its collusion in the production of normative sexual desires.

In the Freudian sense, then, to be an ideal devotee means to take on a passive and culturally defined "feminine" role and to desire to take on whatever "our Father, who is in heaven" dishes out. That human beings become feminized in relation to God the Father in scripture is not new. The prophets see the men of Israel as God's wife and beloved, the *ekklesia* is Jesus' beloved, and the "elect men" in Revelation are the brides of Christ.[18] Neoliberal subjectivities require that one must be eager to submit, seeking and accepting whatever may come. The following sections present how biblical exegetes assist in the production of ideal neoliberal devotees. Their focus on the idea of the suffering servant in Isaiah 53, the translation of the Hebrew verbs of *'innah* and *galah*, and the notion of "exile" in the Book of Ezekiel exposes the close relationship between unconsciously held assumptions of a neoliberal capitalist ideology and

theologies of suffering, submission, and redemption.

About Suffering, Submission, and Redemption in Prophetic Texts

Biblical exegetes, whether they are Jewish or Christian, advance neoliberal capitalist assumptions in their readings of the Bible when the topic engages issues of suffering, submission, and redemption. Mordecai Schreiber's understanding of Jesus' crucifixion by reading it through Isaiah 53 is a case in point. Rather than focus on Jesus as apocalyptic teacher, Jesus as healer, Jesus as social critic, or Jesus as political revolutionary, the torturous crucifixion of Jesus has become central. Subservience and submissiveness, personified as the beaten, humble slave, are images that contemporary scholars, like Schreiber, often emphasize. Christians are called to mimic Jesus' tragic end and to emulate Isaiah's servant. When Schreiber reads Isaiah 53, he suggests that Jesus himself mimics Isaiah's "suffering servant," whom Schreiber believes to be the prophet Jeremiah. Schreiber writes:

> A careful reading of the Gospels shows that Jesus planned his martyrdom with Jeremiah in mind, using Isaiah Chapter 53—which he knew full well was about Jeremiah—as his guide. And the way he kept planning everything that was about to happen to him, step by step, day by day, as he does, for example in the story of the Last Supper and its aftermath, is a clear indication that he used a guide.[19]

For Schreiber, the essence of redemption is suffering; it is plausible yet sobering to think, as Schreiber does, that the theological ideas of salvation and Christian atonement are rooted in the suffering of a single Hebrew prophet, Jeremiah. One might also observe that much of the soteriology and theodicy of the Hebrew Bible, with the exception of Job and Qoheleth, rests upon finding redemption in the suffering of Israel, a redemption that requires submission to God.

Other exegetical observations further expose the tendency in biblical scholarship to praise submission and suffering as ideal postures. For instance, the *pi'el* verb *'innah* illuminates this dynamic. In Hebrew, its meaning is often traditionally rendered into English as "to submit" or "to humble oneself" (e.g., Gen. 16:9; Exod. 32:18; 2 Sam. 22:45; Isa. 53:4), but the translation of this term is complex. For example, in Judg. 19:24, the verb is used to describe the proposed rape of a householder's daughters and Levite's wife by an angry mob. The man says: "Here are my virgin daughter and his concubine; let me bring

them out now. Ravish (‘*innah*) them and do whatever you want to them” (NRSV). The pi’el is also used later in the story, when the Levite recounts the gang rape to the council: “The lords of Gibeah rose up against me, and surrounded the house at night. They intended to kill me, and they raped (‘*innah*) my concubine until she died” (Judg. 20:5, NRSV). The verb, ‘*innah*, also appears in the description of the rape of Tamar in 2 Sam. 13:14, 22, and 32, where it is translated as to force (as to rape). How should we understand this dual use of ‘*innah* that simultaneously connotes humble submission and rape? When one considers the work of Mary Douglas and then observes the nearly identical ways in which the prophet Ezekiel uses the verb ‘*galah*, the nuances between “to humble oneself” and “to be forcefully penetrated” become less subtle.

In light of the work of Douglas, the fact that the acts of humbling oneself and submitting oneself to power are conflated with the reality of rape is not at all unexpected. Douglas maintains that the Israelites understood themselves to be one body. By regulating the orifices (mouth and genitals) and the borders (the skin) of the Israelite body, the Israelites were, in fact, fortifying potential points of community vulnerability. The implication of such concentrated regulation is that any infraction of laws governing the body, a symbolic microcosm of the Israelite world, opens up the entire community to potential destruction. The biblical prophets, for instance, understood the invasion, destruction, and forced exile of Israel (and Judah) to be consequences of neglected and eroded boundaries. Thus, to Douglas, the physical body is a microcosm of any bounded system.

In other words, when the body submits, it must accept the consequence of the submission. The body is left vulnerable and open to “good” things, such as blessings from God, a loving embrace between God the husband and Israel the wife. But as Harvey warned above, with “good” freedoms come “bad” freedoms. As the body submits itself for God’s blessings, it is left open to “bad” things, such as the possibility of violent penetration. We see the same open-ended connotations in Ezekiel’s use of the root *galah*. The root appears in different grammatical forms as verbs and nouns, such as “to be naked” (e.g., Gen. 9.21); “to strip naked” (e.g., Ezek. 16.36); “a revelation of God” (e.g., 1 Sam. 2.27; 3.7; 3.21); “captivity” (e.g., Judges 18.30); exile (2 Sam. 15.19); or “a captive” (e.g., Jer. 39.9). The BDB lists the root’s primary meanings in the *qal* as “to uncover, to remove, to become clear, to reveal oneself, to become naked, to go forth, to emigrate.”[20] Ezekiel’s use of *galah* is broad. He prefers the almost inexhaustible connotations of the root. As readers, we hold on to bits and pieces of meaning

without understanding that each occurrence should evoke every possible meaning at once. Yet, interpreters have often been highly selective. For instance, Herbert Haag recognizes only the "godly meaning," which he translates as "revelation."[21] He explains:

> The root meaning of *glh* is undoubtedly "to unhide" or "disclose," thus to make free and visible that which, hidden and closed, is bound and concealed. Here, the image-laden language in the Hebraic goes in two directions. It can remain a concealed thing to people because it is itself concealed [by some entity], or because the human ear and eye is bound [in or by some entity] and therefore cannot apprehend its object.[22]

According to Haag, the root of *galah* always refers to an act of uncovering something, to show something that was previously hidden. In contrast to this limited view of *galah*, Resa Levitt Kohn notices that the phrase *galah 'ervah*, "uncover nakedness," occurs twenty-four times in the Hebrew Bible. Seventeen times it appears in the sexual codes in the book of Leviticus and five times in Ezekiel 16; 22; 23. Kohn looks only at the sexual connotations of *galah* while ignoring Haag's preference for the root's more metaphorical meaning.

While both scholars write about the same root, Haag focusing on the theological and Kohn on the sexual connotations, neither of them recognizes the extensive range of meaning or the ambiguity of *galah*. A third option, represented by Hans-Jürgen Zobel, synthesizes the socio-political and sexual aspects of the root, claiming that it is related to the Ugaritic root *gly*. This is a verb of motion in the sense of "to enter" and similar to the Phoenician root "to reveal, to uncover." Zobel emphasizes the linguistic connection of *galah* between "uncovering the land" and exile. In his interpretation the land is revealed and thus open to entering in the sense of geopolitical penetration. He emphasizes that the notion of "entering" is a common euphemism for sexual intercourse in the Hebrew Bible, and so the phrase *galah 'ervah* in Ezek. 16:36.37; 22:10 "means either 'to commit fornication' . . . or 'to rape.'"[23] In Zobel's reading, exile is both a consequence and a synonym of rape and fornication. The relationship between the body, the land, and sexual penetration is the prerequisite for understanding the meaning of exile in Ezekiel. Still, according to Zobel the text's theological meaning suggests that God is present and offers redemption. In this reading, then, Ezekiel constructs exile with the help of divergent abstractions of the phrase *galah 'ervah*. In other words, Zobel ties together the notions of submission, rape, and suffering with a revelatory, possibly redemptive encounter with God. A closer look at Ezekiel's use of *galah 'ervah* will make these intersections more apparent.

Although *galah* appears 190 times in the Hebrew Bible, the verb is used seventeen times in Leviticus and fourteen times in Ezekiel 16–23. In Leviticus, the verb only appears in the sexual codes. In addition, if the Levitical codes define social boundaries as physical boundaries, as many scholars claim, readers should be thinking about nasty sex when Ezekiel uses P's terminology in chapters 16 and 23. As the priests in Leviticus tell us what not to do lest we dissolve all of our boundaries and all hell breaks loose, Ezekiel shows us what happened and that, indeed, all hell did break loose. When corporeal boundaries become blurred, to quote Leviticus and Ezekiel, it is an abomination.

Ezekiel continues to use the verb *galah* to connect the condition of being exiled to exposed nakedness and violent penetration. Ezekiel 16 begins with the image of a bastard baby left vulnerable in a field.[24] As the baby grows her bosoms, becomes beautiful, naked, and confused, God "reveals" himself to her. He adorns her with gifts, luxuries, necessities, and she is not grateful. She "opens herself" to everyone else: to Egyptians with large penises, to Assyrians, and to Chaldeans. Those knowing about Leviticus 18 and 20 know that this "opening" is an abomination. In Ezek. 16:36.37 the root *galah* appears in the following sequence: God tells the woman Jerusalem that he will "strip her naked" because she has "exposed her naked body." The description continues with the dominant theme of her being naked and exposed (see vv. 37–52).

Ezekiel uses *galah* again in 21:24 to connect the "uncovering of nakedness" with her being "taken by force" by the enemy. He makes this connection between nakedness and exile even more explicit in 22:10, listing the "abominations" from Leviticus 18 in order. They include the uncovering of a father's nakedness, having sex with menstruating women, and having sex with neighbors' wives, daughters-in-law, and sisters. Leviticus informs Ezekiel's readers that "the land will spit them out" and they will "be cut off from the people" (v. 29) if they do these abominations. There is nothing new in this thesis that Ezekiel and other prophets contend that Jerusalem fell and its inhabitants were exiled because of various adulterous/idolatrous abominations. What we have missed, however, is that the verb *galah* not only connects the exile to exposed nakedness and penetration, it becomes the remedy and the means through which Ezekiel restores the people to God. The interpretation history of *'innah* and of *galah* reflects a core ideology exhumed for theological discourse in the Hebrew Bible. It embraces redemption, as dependent upon suffering, submission, and vulnerable (even violent) exposure. In short, the Bible and its interpreters endorse, in complicated ways, the neoliberal economic agenda. They nurture the ideals of suffering, submission, and redemption that are required in

the neoliberal age.

About Suffering, Submission, and Redemption in Judges 7 and Job

The neoliberal accommodation of biblical interpretation also endorses highly problematic ideas about redemption that concretizes the necessity of submission to power. The story of Gideon illustrates the glaring and constant exegetical invitations to surrendering identity and autonomy in exchange for security. Gideon, the youngest son of the weakest tribe, is commissioned by "an angel of YHWH" (6:11) to lead Israel and destroy the Midianites. Gideon, who is commanded to perform a series of tests, makes sacrifices to Israel's god (YHWH), destroys the altars of Baal, and builds an altar to YHWH. Gideon also tries to verify that it is indeed this god giving these orders. Thus, Gideon requests a wet piece of wool and then a dry piece of wool (6:36–40). God passes the test and then realizes that Gideon has too many warriors. Israel's god fears that "Israel would take the credit away from me, saying, 'My own hand has delivered me'" (7:2). Gideon reduces his soldiers from 32,000 to 10,000 men by allowing those who are afraid to go home (7:3). Since there are still too many, Gideon decides that those three hundred soldiers prostrating themselves and lapping water like a dog stay on (7:6) whereas those soldiers kneeling and drinking from their hands (7:7) go home. Predictably, Bible commentators accommodate neoliberalist concerns when they compel readers to recognize personal property, loyalty, bravery, and submission as central to why and how the three hundred remaining soldiers were chosen. For example, commentators wonder about the distinction between soldiers drinking like "dog lappers" or drinking like "palm drinkers." Jack Sasson's interpretation illustrates Gideon's compliance with the neoliberal principles of bravery and submission:

> I am presuming that the *instrument* for drinking was not at stake, but the *positioning* was. Especially when on the run, dogs remain on all fours when lowering their tongues into the water. So, men who crouched before scooping water were to be differentiated from those who fell to their knees when doing the same.[25]

Sasson does not explain why he thinks God chooses men who crouch like dogs, but his explanation implies that the prostrated or crouched body is preferable to kneeling men. Thus, in his view, neither position indicates weakness, as articulated by Josephus in Ant. 5.216, nor strength, as articulated by Field

Marshall Lord Wavell.[26] Does crouching indicate an eagerness to pounce? Does it indicate subservience to power? Is it indicative of unquenchable thirst or the bestial instinct of survival? The mere fact that commentators pose these questions shows a neoliberal ideology is at work. It bolsters the hierarchal dualisms of weak and strong, courageous and cowardly, or powerful and subservient.

Interestingly, Aaron Hornkohl, suggests that a binary of either/or does not exist in Judg. 7:6.[27] According to Hornkohl, there is no binary opposition in the text; rather a binary is produced in the text's reception. In his view, those who "lap as a dog laps" and "everyone who crouches on his knees to drink" belong to the same group. He thus translates verse 5: "Everyone who laps with his tongue from the water as the dog laps, that is to say, everyone who crouches on his knees to drink."[28] All the other warriors were sent home, except for three hundred soldiers. In Judg. 7:2, God intends to reduce the number of soldiers so that the defeat of the Midianites would be a clear miracle, wrought by God's hand. In other words, the men were chosen by God, not for their skills, merit, bravery, or will, but simply because they belonged to the unit with the smaller number. Read in this fashion, the narrative about the small size of Gideon's army teaches that power and security rest upon the submission to a sovereign entity, God. In short, biblical exegetes have little trouble linking the biblical story with neoliberal notions of security in exchange for submission.

Many scholarly discussions about biblical theology and theodicy insinuate that success is based on merit and deservedness, whereas evil results from disobedience. The message is that God blesses those who submit and punishes those who do not. This idea also arises in the book of Job, which is often held up as refuting any meritocratic system, such as in Job 11:14–15.17:

> Think now, who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off? As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same (Job 4:7–8). If iniquity is in your hand, put it far away, do not let wickedness reside in your tents. Surely then you will lift up your face without blemish; you will be secure, and will not fear. … Your life will be brighter than the noonday.

That the Bible justifies meritocracy and a theology that lays the groundwork for base capitalism is not a new observation. Max Weber describes it quite succinctly when he classifies Protestant theology as the foundation for capitalism.[29] He explains that Protestant theology defines work as a spiritual calling and gives the institutional church the authority to define how people ought to spend the earnings from their work. Weber also recognizes that pre-

industrial and industrial capitalism create the fundamental forces for shaping everything in society, including one's worldviews, the divisions of labor, or gender norms. Since people adhered to these forces, they continuously create and recreate the same hierarchical conditions locking themselves into a reality that Weber terms as "the Iron Cage." He explains it in this way:

> The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so. For when asceticism was carried out of monastic cells into everyday life, and began to dominate worldly morality, it did its part in building the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order. *This order is now bound to the technical and economic conditions of machine production which today determine the lives of all the individuals who are born into this mechanism*, not only those directly concerned with economic acquisition, with irresistible force. Perhaps it will so determine them until the last ton of fossilized coal is burnt. In Baxter's view the care for external goods should only lie on the shoulders of the "saint like a light cloak, which can be thrown aside at any moment." But fate decreed that the cloak should become an iron cage.[30]

In other words, people are both the creators and the creations of that which holds them bound, namely commodities. Since the neoliberal commodities have changed, we seek more than compensation. For us, the ultimate prize is security, so the illusion of security holds us captive today. Thus, neoliberal exegetes emphasize that even in the book of Job, redemption does not consist in restoring Job's "things." Rather, the final sign of his redemption is that he will be secure again: "Surely then you will lift up your face without blemish; you will be secure, and will not fear" (11:15, NRSV). The same sentiment appears in the Pentateuch. There, the prize is not the land and all its blessings but the promise that the people live safely in the land again (Lev. 25:18.19; Lev. 26:5; Deut. 12:10; 33:12; and 33:28).

In sum, suffering, humiliation, and the power of submission betray a queering (i.e., a blurring) of normativity or a normalization of queerness. This process results in an extraordinarily submissive body that craves security. It also connects suffering with hope and humiliation with empowerment. This body, not entirely free from the bonds of compulsive heterosexuality, is patterned after the ideal subject, such as the suffering servant in Isaiah 53, faithful Israel in the prophetic literature, or Gideon in Judges 7. The ideal subject is willing to surrender identity and autonomy in exchange for security; it accommodates neoliberal economic exploitation.

Uncovering the Connections between Economics and Biblical Theologies of

Suffering: Concluding Comments

The competing theologies in the Hebrew Bible place an inordinate emphasis on the redemptive value of suffering and submission. As such, they adhere to neoliberal economic structures of exploitation that require willing, submissive, and suffering bodies. As Foucault observes, power is disseminated through social institutions, and biblical scholarship facilitates the Bible as an integral player in this dissemination. Neoliberal ideologies blur the gender binary with a heightened emphasis on submission in exchange for security.

This is the conundrum that arises. At first glance, the gender binary appears to be relaxed, nearly erased. Yet the binary is, indeed, strengthened at precisely the moment in which it is disassociated from the physical body. It is unwittingly solidified through biblical interpretation that produces theologies of subservience, submission, and security. The social body and, in fact, every single body regardless of its genitalia or gender identity, is rendered feminine, imagined as submissive to a masculinized power. Thus, the gender binary is only ostensibly blurred while it is fortified as the bedrock of everything.

The heightened submission to power continues to be expressed in some Christian publications. For instance, R. Marie Griffith defends submissiveness for women in her eloquent and sensitive account of how submission functions as power in the lives of evangelical women.[31] She explains it in this way:

> I have refused to interpret with undue haste the discourse of female submission as flatly or irrevocably oppressive. Such a depiction would disregard the complexities of evangelical faith and, worse, render these women's devotional lives unrecognizable to themselves. Instead, I have taken pains to credit their piety as a meaningful source of religious and social power, laden with copious practical strategies for inverting conventional hierarchies and enabling women to influence husbands—perhaps even change or save them—and alter their family lives, as well as to create newly whole and joyful selves. As women teach it to each other, Christian submission is a flexible doctrine intricately attached to control—of self and other—and freedom, rather than a rigid blueprint of silent and demoralizing subjugation.[32]

Griffith states that evangelical women find power in submission. There, the valorization of submission, connected to being worthy of God's blessings, is tied to neoliberal ideologies in two ways. First, Griffith's women believe that they must earn and deserve God's blessings, such as water, food, children, or health. This position implies that the quality and belief system of a person determines whether she or he has access to them. Second, Griffith's women promote the idea that a worthy or deserving person must be willing to acquiesce to power.

Some Christian publications must therefore be regarded as heightened illustrations of the contemporary power of the neoliberal paradigm in their readings of the Bible.

In sum, I posit that neoliberal capitalism requires submissive subjects, and biblical scholars, even myself in this present essay, are doing our part to produce them. It is a troubling proposition, I agree. Since a dynamic and global neoliberal capitalism needs and produces docile bodies who willingly submit to power, biblical scholars comply with this demand. Since neoliberal capitalism needs less bodies than industrial capitalism required, those bodies are allowed to wander within wider and more elastic sexual and gender boundaries. That's the good news. However, neoliberal capitalism is still capitalism, as Hennessy explains: "While [postmodern sexualities] may disrupt norms and challenge state practices that are indeed oppressive, they do not necessarily challenge neoliberalism or disrupt capitalism."[33] In fact, the "more open, fluid, ambivalent sexual identities"[34] must be willing and eager to suffer for this elasticity. Relaxed gender boundaries are a step in the right direction, but queerness is manufactured. It, too, serves neoliberal power structures just as much as any sanctioned expression of gender. Put bluntly, queerness does not subvert power. It also does not exist apart from or over and against the ideological center. Rather, it merely moves within that center. Queer bodies, which are, in fact, all bodies, are no longer bound to the female/male physical binary. They are enveloped into and reiterated as submissive femininity serving masculinized power. Gender exists independent of physical bodies, as it always has. It is the illusion and the promise of liberation and security—delivered through theologies of atonement—that keeps bodies bound. Biblical scholars participate in and even endorse the production of neoliberal capitalism by offering interpretations immersed in theologies of suffering, submission, and redemption and by paying for their security with the heavy price of acquiescence and obedience to the neoliberal status quo.

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[1] David Harvey, *A Brief Introduction to Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 21.

[2] Johanna Oksala, "Feminism and Neoliberal Governmentality," *Foucault Studies* 16 (2013): 32–53, 34.

[3] Harvey, *A Brief Introduction*, 36.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics. Lectures at the Collège de France 1978–79* (ed. Michel Senellart; Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 243–5.

[6] Oksala, "Feminism and Neoliberal Governmentality," 33.

[7] Harvey, *A Brief Introduction*, vii.

[8] For an accurate and more complex description of neoliberal capitalism, see Rosemary Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000), 74–8. Marcella Althaus-Reid also makes clear the relationships between capitalism and theology in the production of sexualities; see her *Indecent Theology* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000).

[9] Harvey, *A Brief Introduction*, 241.

[10] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1995).

[11] Harvey, *A Brief Introduction*, 300.

[12] Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure*, 107.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Rosemary Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000), 108.

[15] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY: Routledge Press, 1990), 135–41.

[16] Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 199.

[17] Ibid., 200.

[18] Tina Pippen has an insightful article on this issue entitled, "The Joy of (Apocalyptic) Sex," in *Gender and Apocalyptic Desire*, ed. Lee Quinby and Brenda Brasher (London: Equinox, 2006).

[19] Mordecai Schreiber, "The Real 'Suffering Servant': Decoding a Controversial Passage in the Bible," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 37.1 (January–March 2009): 35–44.

[20] Frances Brown, S. R. Driver, Charles A. Briggs, James Strong, and Wilhelm Gesenius, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 162–3.

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[22] Ibid.

[23] Hans-Jürgen Zobel, “galah,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 476–88.

[24] So much has been written on this passage and Ezekiel 23 that I do not reinterpret them entirely. I focus only on those parts containing *galah*.

[25] Jack Sasson, *Judges 1–12: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 352.

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[28] Ibid., 79.

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[30] Ibid., 181.

[31] R. Marie Griffith, *God’s Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997).

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CHAPTER 15

BIBLICAL BORDER SLIPPAGE AND FEMINIST POSTCOLONIAL CRITICISM

JUDITH E. MCKINLAY

BORDERS are about containment, keeping certain people and ideologies in and certain people and ideologies out. Yet borders, like ideologies themselves, are porous, continually infiltrated, broken down, disregarded, and abandoned. The Bible knows this. Immediately after its great liturgical opening, the Tanakh moves to the garden narrative where Eve gains humankind its ethical sense by a deliberate boundary breaking that paves the way for the human couple to slip through to earth with the knowledge of good and evil. So, too, Hokma (Wisdom), she in whom YHWH delights (Prov. 8:30–31), slips through the heavenly/earthly border, persuading, even cajoling, earthly humans to keep safely within the boundary of life, by recognizing the very difference between good and evil. Eve and Hokma may be seen as biblical guides in a study of border slippage, taking as its measure the Wisdom trilogy of ethical relations, justice, and equity (Prov. 1:3b). Their texts, however, issue due warning: border engagement frequently meets with "muddiness" and "unpredictable relationships,"[1] as the Genesis Garden tale and Kesilut's smooth words teasing with death, not life (Prov. 9:13–17), testify.

POSTCOLONIAL CRITICISM

Colonialism is a matter of slippage, explicitly planned and purposeful territorial slippage. This is the concern of postcolonial criticism with its prefix "post" announcing its focus on the consequences of people appropriating other people's land, with all the justice issues that flow from that. It is keenly interested in how colonial ideologies maintain their dominance. Jane Kelsey writes of their "durability," that "colonial leopards do not change their spots; they just stalk their prey in different ways."[2] While this inter-relationship of past and present is seen as setting the agenda for postcolonial criticism, discussion continues about the prefix "post." Is timing the main or sole factor, "a simple departure from the colonial past"? Or could it rather signal a "space of questioning," as Mayra Rivera suggests?[3] A space in which competing or differing ideologies from different texts and different histories and political circumstances are seen more clearly, with connections made that draw the reader into the critical fray. The questioning continues.

What scholars do not question is the close relationship between the power dynamics of the colonized and the colonizer during colonialism with that of imperialism. Certainly, there is a distinction between these two. Defined by Fernando Segovia, imperialism flows from "what transpires in the controlling center," whereas colonialism flows from "what transpires in the controlled periphery." Yet Segovia reminds readers that these differences are not exclusive because "there is no imperialism without colonialism and colonialism without imperialism."[4] As the number of studies increases, postcolonialism has become a criticism with tentacles, not only "encompass(ing) imperialism" and colonialism but also "decolonisation, globalization and neo-colonialism."[5]

As in every field, there are pathfinders. Postcolonial studies owes much to Franz Fanon, giving voice to the "wretched of the world,"[6] to Edward Said, highlighting the ploys of "othering,"[7] to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, pointing not only to the silencing of the "subaltern" but also to the use of catachresis, Spivak's term for taking the dominant discourse and turning it against itself,[8] and to Homi Bhabha, recognizing the subtlety of the colonizer/colonized relationship characterized by mimicry, ambivalence, and hybridity.[9] Biblical postcolonial criticism, concerned with colonial/imperial entanglements within and behind biblical texts, has its own history.[10] Laura Donaldson's 1996 edited issue of Semeia 75, *Postcolonialism and Scriptural Reading*, was a landmark. This was followed two years later by R. S. Sugirtharajah's *The Postcolonial Bible*.[11] That same year Kwok Pui-lan chaired the SBL session, "New Testament Studies and Postcolonial Studies." Postcolonialism was now on the agenda, although

Postcolonial Studies became a separate unit at the annual meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) only in 2011.

Feminist Biblical Postcolonial Criticism

Feminist postcolonial criticism has its own history and owes much to Musa W. Dube. Her *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, published in 2000, offered the postcolonial strategy of "Rahab's reading prism." She described this strategy as "a postcolonial feminist eye of many angles" that detects not only "whether a text is imperializing or anti-imperial" but also "assist(s) postcolonial readers to read against … patriarchal forms of oppression."[12] The distinction between the two tasks is significant. As Dube states: "[T]o confront imperialism as a postcolonial feminist, one must, first, recognize that patriarchal oppression overlaps with but is not identical with imperialism."[13] Kwok Pui-lan, recognizing "the intricate relationship" between colonialism and patriarchy, described the task in the following way: "The exploration of the Interstices of different forms of oppression under the shadow of empire constitutes the exciting postcolonial feminist project."[14] Kwok also called for "imagination" to fuel "a desire, a determination and a process of disengagement from the whole colonial syndrome" in its "many forms and guises."[15] Gale Yee had already insisted that "the study of gender must include race, class, and colonial status as categories of analysis."[16] The agenda was set, and feminist postcolonial readings continue to appear in journals, essay collections, and individual monographs. While most publications focus on narratives in which women are major players, many of the same gender/nation issues appear in the poetic texts, particularly those of the Prophets. Erin Runions used Bhabha's postcolonial theory in a study of gender and nation in Micah, and Christl Maier and Carolyn Sharp edited a collection of feminist and postcolonial essays on Jeremiah.[17]

Underlying this work is the recognition that biblical texts, as literary artifacts, are not innocent or unworldly. They reflect attitudes honed by their writers' own experiences. For contexts make a difference, both the contexts of the biblical writers and the contexts of the interpreters. While Israel's jubilant conquest narratives celebrate the winning of mighty battles, as borders are crossed, with the accompanying "othering" of the defeated indigenous inhabitants, other biblical texts express Israel's sorrow at the loss of its land through "other" peoples' conquests, and its difficulties as a victimized people under "other"

imperial rule. Different circumstances, different ideologies, different writings. Feminist postcolonial critics are also aware that these texts carry the views and ideologies of the powerful male literate elite. Rarely is the voice of the "subaltern" to be heard, more rarely indeed that of the female. Feminist postcolonial studies therefore fit with Sugirtharajah's description of biblical postcolonial criticism in general as "an interventionist instrument which refuses to take the dominant reading as an uncomplicated representation of the past."[18]

Yet if, as Sugirtharajah states, postcolonial criticism is "a reading posture" and not a methodology per se,[19] choices have to be made in the positioning of this "posture." Does one begin hunting out original contexts, editorial revisions, or additions that weave a tapestry of political complexities and ideologies? Does one engage in historical studies or choose literary tools for final-form readings? Does one read with an eye on one's own readerly context, for it is not only biblical contexts that matter. Experiences in the reader's own context may well echo aspects of those in and behind the biblical text. All these approaches are possible. One of Musa Dube's suggestions and recommendations is for "reading sacred and secular texts, ancient and contemporary texts … side by side, to highlight (a) how they propound imperializing or decolonizing ideology, and (b) how they use gender in the discourse of subordination and domination."[20] This is similar to Edward Said's proposed literary counterpoint, with its interweaving of different narratives.[21] Tat-siong Benny Liew describes such a reading strategy as engaging in a detour "that takes one in and through a different land(scape). … By the time one (re)turns to the biblical text, what and how one sees will … have become different because of all the differences that one has encountered along the way."[22] These juxtapositions are frequently unsettling, raising sharp questions about the readers, their contexts, and the ideologies of the texts. Complications emerge that lead to grappling with the issues of "ethical relations, justice, and equity."

Whatever the choices, significant challenges face postcolonial critics. As Graham Huggan writes: "It is arguably the greatest task of postcolonial criticism to 'unthink' the biases of colonialist thought," that those of us living in postcolonial societies have consciously or unconsciously inherited.[23] This challenge applies equally to biblical critics, for, as Segovia recognizes: "The reality of empire … constitutes an omnipresent, inescapable, and overwhelming reality."[24] It is to quote Ngugi wa Thiong'o, a matter of "decolonising the mind."[25] Sugirtharajah writes of "an undertaking of social and political commitment," with its critical tools of use only "as long as they probe injustices,

produce new knowledge which problematizes well-entrenched positions, and enhances the lives of the marginalized."[26] The sense of urgency, expressed by Laura Donaldson and Kwok Pui-lan, to see the interactions of colonialism, gender, and religion as "some of the most significant and contradictory forces influencing our world today," continues to hold true.[27] It is indeed clear that the work of feminist postcolonial criticism is a matter of "ethical relations, justice, and equity." Tan Yak-hwee describes its study rightly as "a political activity."[28]

Three Readings

While feminist postcolonial study draws together the two critical approaches, the feminist and the postcolonial, there is always the tension of how to combine both of them, just as in feminist studies alone there can be contrasting readings with quite different conclusions. The following readings explore some of those possibilities and tensions.

Miriam

The book of Exodus, which offers a prelude to the conquest narratives, describes the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt. At the beginning of this text, Miriam, Moses' unnamed sister, is a central figure who aids and abets, along with the wily midwives and Pharaoh's daughter, the survival of Israel's future Exodus leader (Exod. 2:4–9). Notably, a lot of women are needed to save this infant Moses. While many feminist readings celebrate this combined effort, Cheryl Exum, with a sharp twist of the lens, views it very differently. She detects the ploy of "diffusing the influence of women. … Imagine the power one woman would have had if she alone had saved Moses."[29] The diffusion of power among numerous women weakens the overall effect of their abetting the life of the Israelite leader. This dilemma leads to a further question. Were the women's crucial roles "a kind of compensation" for their minor places in the narrative that follows?[30] Add the postcolonial lens and Miriam's "deferential and subservient" manner in addressing Pharaoh's daughter comes into view, as she repeatedly assures Pharaoh's daughter that she is acting "for you." Angeline Song recognizes these signs. She asks whether the text does not imply that Miriam

uses the overlord's language.[31] This reading comes natural to Song as a member of the oppressed Other growing up and living in a hostile Egypt. Song's interpretation describes a differently viewed Miriam, as feminist postcolonial exegesis frequently reads from this "Other" perspective.

The postcolonial reading also questions Egypt's role in this foundational narrative. In Genesis 12, Egypt was the country to which Abram and Sarai fled from famine and where, after the Sarah debacle, Pharaoh "dealt well with Abram" (Gen. 12:16). How to reconcile these two descriptions of Egypt? Were these texts written in and for two different contexts? As Jon Berquist writes: "Egypt was Persia's chief rival on its western borders for the early years of the Persian Empire."[32] Can one then surmise that a tale positioning Egypt as a power outwitted by slaves and even defied by women would win the Persian masters' approval? In other words, has Israel's cultural memory reconfigured the past to fit the circumstances of its present?

While Miriam is not mentioned in the Exodus account itself, in chapter 15 she is on the "other" side, across the border of the Reed Sea. Now named and acknowledged as a "prophet" and as "Aaron's sister," Miriam leads the women in a victory dance, repeating the first verse of the great celebratory song. Here too a postcolonial feminist reading hesitates. Is this simply a postscript? Or is there a distancing of Miriam from the gloating conquest ideology heard in Exod. 15:14–16 of the full song?[33] As Gale Yee writes: "There is a darker side of the Exodus story in which the victim becomes the victimizer, and the oppressed mutates into the oppressor."[34] Is Miriam resisting this mutation? Can one claim her as a postcolonial critic before her time? Or does this reading twist the lens too far? What must be celebrated is the fact that an enslaved landless people (Israel) escaped and the subalterns have found their voice.

Immediately after Miriam's one-verse song (Exod. 15:21), Moses gives the order and the long trek of the people begins. They are now refugees, seeking a place in "other" peoples' land. It is a narrative that resonates with the experiences of so many people fleeing destructive violence and brutal mistreatment century after century. Postcolonial criticism calls for the addition of trauma studies here.[35] Is it a surprise that conflict breaks out over leadership? It is a matter of keeping human borders, and Miriam crosses the leadership boundary in challenging Moses. These human borders and boundaries are complex: Aaron, as brother, is an accomplice in the challenge. But, as a priest, he cannot be defiled. Consequently Miriam alone is left suffering the punishing defilement.[36] With the challenge defeated and the boundaries firmly established, along with Miriam "recreated" after her seven days exclusion outside the camp

(Num. 12: 15), the land-seeking journey continues. There is, however, no happy ending for this migrant. Num. 20:1 records her dying at Kadesh, its resonance of holiness carrying again a sense of boundaries. Miriam dies a migrant's death. Thus, viewing Miriam through a feminist postcolonial lens is a matter of turning and turning it again, pondering what is seen.

Rahab

Rahab's story, told in Joshua 2, slips to the "other" side, to a Canaanite woman in a Canaanite city.[37] How she and her actions are viewed is an important question. Is she, in Tikva Frymer-Kensky's words, the "righteous-proselyte-prophet"?[38] After all, Rahab is lauded by later writers, both Jewish and Christian, for her religious convictions. Or is she, as Musa Dube declares, a "literary phantom of imperialism's 'cultural bomb'"?[39] Again it is a matter of choosing the lens and interpreting what is seen. While Rahab might appear a heroine, saving her family through wily manipulation,[40] Dube warns of "the dangers of reclaiming women's roles without naming its imperialistic agendas."[41] Viewed through Dube's postcolonial lens, Rahab's tale is none other than "a prescript bearing the projected desires of the coloniser."[42]

What is clear is that this narrative is the prelude to Joshua's victorious razing of Canaanite Jericho. He sends out spies to view the land in preparation for what is to be a significant military border slippage (v. 1). Once across, however, the entire campaign turns to farce. They get no further than the house of a prostitute. Rahab, living in "her house on the outer side of the city wall" (v. 15), operates as the boundary. A feminist postcolonial lens reveals a tale of sexualized conquest, sure to arouse a frisson of excitement or fear in the Israelite audience. As Carolyn Sharp recognizes: "Underneath its seductive surface, this story throbs with the terror of ideological nightmare … the spies spending the night with Rahab portrays the ultimate risk: that the vanguard of the Israelite invasion might be corrupted by the enticements of an actual Canaanite."[43] But did the spies really sleep with her? The MT text suppresses this idea, reporting simply that they slept "there," at her house (v. 1). The sexual frisson comes with Rahab's wily reply to the king's messengers (v. 4), with its verb "come" (*bo'*), exploiting its double meaning and so implying the opposite. These were clients coming for sex. She may not know where they have come from or their present whereabouts, but she does "know" men.[44] It is all comedy with Israelite spies

hiding under flax on a prostitute's roof. Nor does it get any better. They are forced to swear an oath to YHWH that they will not only rescue this Canaanite woman but also her family and household. No regard here for Israel's *herem* order (Deut 20:17). Let down ignominiously through a window, they return to Joshua with a report couched in her words. The change from "melt in fear before you" (v. 9) to "before us" (v. 24) is the final comic irony.

The feminist postcolonial interpretation of Joshua 2 uncovers a tale carrying multiple messages that are harmful on many levels. Flagged as a prostitute, Rahab functions as a cipher for a land open for entering. But she also flags "foreign" women as promiscuous, sites of un-cleanliness, a danger to all comers. As a literary representation as "Native Woman," set "at the intersections of gender, race, and imperial power," Rahab's multiple identities cannot "be dismissed as just a textual representation."[45] For, as Steed Davidson explains, such representations have the power "to name reality," and this naming affects the lives of contemporary indigenous women.[46] Nasili Vaka'uta issues a call "to rehabilitate (read: '*rahab*-ilitate') the construction of 'native women' in biblical and imperial crossing accounts," both to "*release*" them "from the violent gaze of the Deuteronomistic porno-tropic texts and to *rehabilitate* how we read in order to resist buying into the illusions of imperial imagination inscribed in the text."[47]

Nor do the worries end here. This Canaanite "othered" Rahab is "portrayed as one who totally believes in the superiority of the colonizer,"[48] to the extent that in vv. 8–11 she even appears as a YHWH believer. Filled with Torah quotes (Exod. 15:15–16; Deut. 4:39), her speech is an Israelite testimony. Yet a postcolonial reading pauses. Is Rahab now the colonized mimic woman, using mimicry for her own purposes, her own survival?[49] She quotes Deut. 4:39, but has she read Deut. 18:9? These questions, however, have to be asked of the Israelite scribe who represses Rahab's "real otherness" and portrays her not "as Canaanite woman, but as an Israelite theologian disguised as the 'other.'"[50] The storytelling is skillful, as Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher notes: "On the level of the plot … the foreign woman appears in a superior position." Yet read with an eye for the dominant ideology, it is clear is that "the Israelite discourse is dominating and the genuine voice of the foreigner, the other, is suppressed and silenced."[51] Israel has not only "othered" and sexualized Rahab, but also used her as a ventriloquist, to speak words "in praise of themselves as conquering heroes."[52] This is a postcolonial worry. Yet, and there is always that "and yet," Erin Runions detects multiple layers in the tale and reads this "otherwise" again. She

relishes Rahab as a queer trickster figure who "humorously mimics, shadows, and critiques the dominant and oppressive culture."[53] Choosing the lens and interpreting what is seen is a complex matter.

Rahab's story, however, does not end at Joshua 2. The epilogue in Joshua 6 reports that the two spies rescue Rahab and her household, following their sworn oath, so that "she lived in Israel until this day" (Josh. 6:25). One might wonder how Rahab slept at night, having left her people to their violent fate.[54] Or is her departure a positive, as Michael Carden suggests? That "[a]s the walls of Jericho collapse bringing together inside and outside, Rahab, the woman of the walls, collapses the distinction between Israelite and Canaanite."[55] Would Israel, reading this story under Persian rule, recognize faith over ethnicity as its own identity marker? Yet Josh. 6:23 has her *outside the camp*. Is the scribe hesitating? Is Rahab not fully Israelite? Is she Bhabha's marginalized hybrid? Or being "racialized, minoritized, and sexualized," is she the "perpetual foreigner"? [56] Or does this "outside" space function as Bhabha's "third space," "initiat[ing] new signs of identity," looking to a future "of collaboration and contestation?"[57] The textual tensions remain. Still a plot cohering so closely with the ideology of conquest, with an apparent enemy not so much "melt[ing] in fear" before YHWH as melting into a potential aid and agent of Israel's imperial plan, must remain a postcolonial worry. These are slippages that raise once again the matter of "ethical relations, justice, and equity."

Achsah

Achsah, whose story is told twice (Josh. 15:15–19; Judg. 1:11–15), appears as an Israelite already living in the land and wanting more of it. Again, there is the issue of gender in this narrative.Her father, Caleb, offers Achsah as bait, to spur on the capture of a Canaanite city. As a city, Debir (Kiriath-sepher) is grammatically feminine, a doubly gendered move. In return for taking one female entity, Othniel, the victor, is to be given another.[58] Achsah is the prize, the trophy bride.

In Joshua, the tale follows the recounting of "the inheritances that the Israelites received in the land of Canaan" (14:1). A lot of killing, a lot of "striking with the edge of the sword," and a lot of "utterly destroying" has taken place since Rahab's tale. Judges 1 differs in opening with the call: "Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites," with the divine answer: Judah. What does

not differ in the two scribal collections, apart from a few minor word changes, is the Achsah tale itself. Once married, Achsah is not the quiet behind-the-scenes wife but she is assertive, urging or inducing Othniel to ask her father for more land.[59] Further, she claims that she will act herself if Othniel does not respond to the request, notably the MT offers none.[60] And then she acts. The sentence continues without a pause, returning her to her father, as she asks him for additional springs of water, as a *b^{e}raka*.[61] Asks? Her imperative, "give me," sounds more like a demand.[62] Was this water shortage a slippage on Caleb's part? If so, he complies. She shows herself as the *hayil* woman of Proverbs, "setting her mind on a field and acquiring it" (Prov. 31:16)![63] And, like the woman of Proverbs, Achsah is practical, with an eye to the future, for "if she is to live here, then the land needs to be productive, and for that water is a must."[64] While feminists may applaud, postcolonial readers recognize an acquisitive colonial woman.

Focus the postcolonial lens more sharply and more worries appear. This tale that began with the giving (away) of a woman is essentially a tale of the giving (away) of land by the victorious military leader Caleb. Viewed through a feminist lens, the story presents a woman and land as being given away at a leader's discretion.[65] This coupling of woman and land is even more explicit if Judg. 1:15 (par. Josh. 15:19) is read as Achsah having been given away "as Negev land," which the MT allows. The key is that all this giving is of "other people's" land. Achsah and Othniel are settlers on "other people's" territory. The text is clear. After military success, the allotting of land follows. Breach the borders, the land is yours, with Achsah playing her part in a cameo of Israel's idealized conquest. The parallels with the confiscation and allotment of land in nineteenth-century New Zealand are, for me, all too clear.[66] Ruta Te Manuahura's letter, dated 1881, illustrates the "other" experience. She writes:

> [M]y land in Waikato that was confiscated by the Government … . I have had much land taken from me for no reason whatever, for neither I nor my husband committed any wrong against the Crown.[67]

Four years later she is offered a piece of land, but where Achsah's land is dry, her land includes a swamp and a deep gully. So, like Achsah, Ruta Te Manuahura requests "more acres in lieu of the bad portion that cannot be made use of." This, however, is her own land! Eventually she receives sixty-eight acres, but not without a lengthy struggle. A letter from the Native Office records that "[t]his Native woman is not only the most difficult to satisfy but is very

vexatious in respect of her land claim which has been before the office for years."[68] How unlike Caleb.

Yet there is a significant slippage in Achsah's tale. What was overtly stated in Rahab's narrative is covertly mentioned in Achsah's: Israel's inherent hybridity. For Achsah is the daughter of Caleb, son of Jephunneh, the Kenizzite, and now wife of Othniel, son of Kenaz. These people are Kenizzites. She is an "other" woman gaining "other" people's land. If this story is an ancient Kenizzite clan saga, inserted into Israel's conquest tradition, this "otherness" is largely glossed over.[69] Caleb appears as a Kenizzite in Josh. 14:6, 13–14, and Othniel as a son of Kenaz in both Achsah tales, yet their exploits are recounted as significantly Israelite. Is this the final irony? Those conquering or slipping their way into Canaan to become part of Israel's sacred story bring "otherness" with them. Or, as Susanne Scholz suggests, they are "others … accepted only if they adapt to the sociopolitical and cultural religious goals of the Israelites?"[70] This idea fits with the findings of two New Zealand postcolonial scholars, who recognize that while "the logic of settler colonialism attempts to eradicate all traces of prior occupation … [a] 'necrophilic' national love of the Indigenous lavishes attention on an 'other' that conforms with and facilitates settler sovereignty."[71] So, in Israelite terms, a "good" Kenizzite, can be a good Israelite. Borders are indeed porous.

Rahab and Achsah's narratives became part of Israel's conquest tradition, both tales were likely told generation after generation, and heard differently according to political circumstance. Debate continues about the dating of the editing processes, but if both books were written, read, or heard in the context of imperial Persian rule, they may have been understood as "reflect(ing) the concerns and anxiety" of a people under imperial overlords. Would they have understood these tales as resistance writings, "a call for empowering the oppressed"?[72] We, as readers, may sympathize with these concerns. But the dangers remain, for their imperializing and gendered messages are clearly present in the text.

Final Ponderings

The recognition of the long process of retelling, rewriting, and re-editing raises the question how a community's cultural memory relates to its sense of identity. Diana Edelman and Ehud Ben Zvi, drawing upon the work of cultural and social

memory theorists, view biblical texts as a "network of sites of memory," as a "memory landscape."[73] Understood in this way, "[a]ncient Israel" emerges as "an entity that imagined, remembered, and identified with … the 'Israel' constructed through … and evoked by reading and rereading a particular repertoire of books."[74] For instance, Gaétane-Diane Forget sees the Deuteronomistic History as "truly a window in the laboratory of Israelite cultural memory weaving." She marvels at "the sheer genius of the tradents in their capacity to generate a common bond among its people by using stories about cult, politics and the concept of *otherness*."[75] The relationship between text and identity changes and evolves according to political circumstance. While Rahab's narrative, with its conquest "memory," bolstered Israel's sense of identity later, the story may also have reminded returnees from Babylon that "true Israel" meant keeping people of the land *outside the camp*. An awareness of this dynamic relationship, as Israel continually drew upon its collective memory to maintain its sense of identity, provides a sense that the texts are active life-giving documents. What postcolonial studies highlights is memory's "twin," "forgetting,"[76] that "need[s] to get history wrong to get nation right."[77] Ancient Canaan's glory and right to its own land have no place in Israel's memory bank.[78] Michael Rothberg recognizes the general need in postcolonial studies for "an understanding of "the relations between memory, identity, and violence—the trauma and rupture produced by conquest, occupation, and genocide."[79] Add gender, and this recognition is also a call, too, for feminist biblical postcolonial studies.

It is a truism that readers always read from "somewhere" and that that "somewhere" makes a difference, as highlighted by Fernando Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert's 1995 collection, *Reading from This Place*.[80] Social location is a particular concern for postcolonial readers. As Musa Dube writes: "Former colonized lands bear the marks and scars of this history, and many times the wounds are still bleeding, physically and psychologically."[81] For her context, "the Scramble for Africa continues as a historical reality and interpretation crux for African biblical scholars."[82] For Madipoane Masenya, "Africa is the place from which we read and engage with the Bible. Reading from this place implies an acceptance of our socio-historic situatedness."[83] Context makes a difference in Laura Donaldson's reading of Ruth in which Orpah "connotes hope." For just as "Cherokee women have done for hundreds, if not thousands, of years, Orpah chooses the house of her clan and spiritual mother over the desire for another culture."[84] Recognizing the way in which the insistent construct of Moses'

“authentic” Hebrew roots in Exod. 2:1–4:18 denies his Egyptian hybridity, Sonia Kwok Wong advises to “read with resistance” in a Post-Handover Hong Kong to maintain “dialectical strength of hybridity.”[85] While most postcolonial critics write from contexts of the colonized, biblical readers whose heritage lies with colonizers and colonial settlers need to make their own connections, acknowledging, with Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, “the risk of taking over (colonizing) yet again.”[86]

Ironically, postcolonial readers sometimes face the accusation of being “unfaithful.” Jione Havea observes this problem when he explains: “[C]ritics assume that if they are postcolonial in their way of thinking then they should not be involved in faith-related activities, as if postcolonial thinking is only for ‘secular people’ but not for people of faith.”[87] Yet most feminist postcolonial scholars, whether confessional or not, are drawn by a strong commitment to “ethical relations, justice, and equity.” In many ways, the texts themselves invite postcolonial engagement, as they are read in a world where boundary violence and ethnic conflict sadly remain live issues.

There is a further question whether biblical postcolonial criticism is simply an academic “in-house” matter. If it is a political act to connect present contexts with history, how and to whom does it reach out? Stephen Moore, summarizing Aijaz Ahmad’s trenchant critique, writes of the products of postcolonial theory being “turned,” like goods imported from the Third World, “into refined or luxury products for a privileged intelligentsia … all direct engagement with the extra-academic world … being foreclosed almost as a matter of course.”[88] While Ahmad was writing from the particular context and time of 1992, the question needs to stay on the agenda. There is also the matter of appropriate writing style. Sugirtharajah writes of the “scholarly” expectation of “an insider writing style that involves complicated phrases and syntax” effectively excluding the outsider.[89] These are ongoing concerns.

In summary, Malebogo Kgalemang writes:

> Postcolonial feminist analysis of the Bible “reads” and “writes” woman at the collusion and intersection of patriarchy, imperialism, neocolonialism, gender, nation, and religion in the Bible. It is rooted in postcolonial feminist theory, in postcolonial biblical interpretation, and in feminist interpretation of the Bible.

In sum, postcolonial feminist interpretation involves “pointing out a crucial lack of attention to the colonial and imperial history of the Bible” and the “colonial and imperial history” of our world.[90] This task is our challenge. For those of us working in the field, feminist postcolonial criticism is both personal

and political. Despite the questions raised, and the difficulties posed, commitment and passion fuel postcolonial feminist criticism. The work is and needs to be ongoing, just as there is no end to the reading and understanding of texts.

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[5] Stephen D. Moore, "The Revelation to John," in *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia and R. S. Sugirtharajah (London: T&T Clark, 2013), 437.

[6] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (trans. Constance Farrington; London: Penguin Books, 1967).

[7] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1978), *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993).

[8] See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313.

[9] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

[10] See Stephen D. Moore and Fernando F. Segovia, "Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Beginnings, Trajectories, Intersections," in *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections*, ed. Moore and Segovia, 1–22, and R. S. Sugirtharajah, chap. 1, "Charting the Aftermath: A Review of Postcolonial Criticism," in *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 11–42.

[11] R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *The Postcolonial Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

[12] Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2000),123, 201.

[13] Ibid., 43.

[14] Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 2.

[15] Ibid., 81.

[16] Gale A. Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve; Woman as Evil in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003), 4.

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[19] R. S. Sugirtharajah, "A Postcolonial Exploration of Collusion and Construction in Biblical Interpretation," in *The Postcolonial Bible*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 93.

[20] Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, 199–200.

[21] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 51.

[22] Tat-siong Benny Liew, "Margins and (Cutting-)Edges: On the (Il)Legitimacy and Intersections of Race, Ethnicity, and (Post)Colonialism," in *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections*, ed. Moore and Segovia, 146.

[23] Graham Huggan, "Theory and Practice: Introduction," in *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies*, ed. Graham Huggan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 300.

[24] Fernando F. Segovia, "Biblical Criticism and Postcolonial Studies: Toward a Postcolonial Optic," in R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *The Postcolonial Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 56.

[25] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1980).

[26] Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, 14, 100.

[27] Laura E. Donaldson and Kwok Pui-lan, "Introduction," in *Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Religious Discourse*, ed. Laura E. Donaldson and Kwok Pui-lan (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), 1. See also Susanne Scholz, *Introducing the Women's Hebrew Bible: Feminism, Gender Justice, and the Study of the*

Old Testament (second rev. and exp. ed.; London: T&T Clark, 2017), 175, noting that the ultimate goal of feminist biblical studies is "the socio-political, economic, and religious understanding and transformation of androcentric and hierarchical structures in our postcolonial world."

[28] Tan Yak-hwee, "Postcolonial Feminist Biblical Criticism: An Exploration," in *Feminist Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century: Scholarship and Movement*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2014), 282.

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[30] Ibid., 85.

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[32] Jon L. Berquist, "Postcolonialism and Imperial Motives for Canonization," *Semeia* 75 (1996): 25.

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[34] Gale A. Yee, "Postcolonial Biblical Criticism," in *Methods for Exodus*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 214–15.

[35] See Irene Visser, "Trauma Theory and Postcolonial Literary Studies," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 47.3 (2011): 270–82; "Decolonizing Trauma Theory: Retrospect and Prospects," *Humanities* 4 (2015): 250–65.

[36] Claudia V. Camp, *Wise, Strange and Holy: The Strange Woman and the Making of the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 231.

[37] See Judith E. McKinlay, "Rahab: A Hero/ine?," *Biblical Interpretation* 7.1 (1999): 44–57; *Reframing Her: Biblical Women in Postcolonial Focus* (The Bible in the Modern World 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2004), 37–50; *Troubling Women and Land*, 99–119.

[38] Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Reading Rahab," chap. in *Studies in Bible and Feminist Criticism* (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 2006), 218, originally published in Mordechai Cogan, Barry L. Eichler, and Jeffrey H. Tigay eds., *Tehillah Le-Moshe: Biblical and Judaic Studies in Honor of Moshe Greenberg* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 57–67, concluding, "in the end, it is the reader … who must decide."

[39] Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 80.

[40] See McKinlay, "Rahab: A Hero/ine?," 44–57.

[41] Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 76.

[42] Ibid., 77.

[43] Sharp, *Irony and Meaning*, 98.

[44] L. Daniel Hawk, *Joshua* (Berit Olam; Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 43.

[45] Steed Vernyl Davidson, "Gazing (at) Native Women: Rahab and Jael in Imperializing and Postcolonial Discourses," in *Postcolonialism and the Hebrew Bible: The Next Step*, ed. Roland Boer (Semeia Studies 70; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 69–70.

[46] Ibid. On how colonial Oceania experienced the same mix of "feminized land and sexualized body," see Nasili Vaka'uta, "Border Crossing/Body Whoring: Rereading Rahab of Jericho with Native Women," in *Bible, Borders, Belonging(s): Engaging Readings from Oceania*, ed. Jione Havea, David J. Neville, and M.

Elaine Wainwright (Semeia Studies 75; Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2014), 144–48, notes how colonial Oceania experienced the same mix of "feminized land and sexualized body."

[47] Vaka'uta, "Border Crossing/Body Whoring," 143, 151–2.

[48] Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 78.

[49] See Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 102–22.

[50] Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher, "'She Came to Test Him with Hard Questions': Foreign Women and their View on Israel," *Biblical Interpretation* 15 (2007): 148.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Lori L. Rowlett, "Disney's Pocahontas and Joshua's Rahab in Postcolonial Perspective," in *Culture, Entertainment and the Bible*, ed. George Aichele (JSOTSup 309; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 75.

[53] Erin Runions, "From Disgust to Humor: Rahab's Queer Affect," in *Bible Trouble: Queer Reading at the Boundaries of Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Teresa Hornsby and Ken Stone (Semeia Studies 67; Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2011), 70.

[54] McKinlay, "Rahab: A Hero/ine?," 53.

[55] Michael Carden, "Joshua," in *The Queer Bible Commentary*, ed. Deryn Guest, Robert E. Goss, Mona West, and Thomas Bohache (London: SCM Press, 2006), 158.

[56] Kah-Jin Jeffrey Kuan and Mai-Anh Le Tran, "Reading Race Reading Rahab: A 'Broad' Asian American Reading of a 'Broad' Other," in *Postcolonial Interventions: Essays in Honor of R. S. Sugirtharajah*, ed. Tat-siong Benny Liew (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), 39, recognizing that "[s]he can be what you make of her" (41), while adding the provocative question "but for better or for worse?"

[57] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1.

[58] So Uriah Y. Kim, "Is There an "Anticonquest" Ideology in the Book of Judges?" in *Postcolonialism and the Hebrew Bible: The Next Step*, ed. Roland Boer (Semeia Studies 70; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 125.

[59] See critical commentaries for discussions of the possible range of meanings of the verb.

[60] The Septuagint and Vulgate read Othniel urging Achsah to ask. Is this a variant tradition or a problem with such a female initiative?

[61] Could *b^{e}raka* imply divine assent? Another possible worry.

[62] While Joshua and Judges use different words, both verbs are in the imperative.

[63] Richard D. Nelson, "What Is Achsah Doing in Judges?," in *The Impartial God: Essays in Biblical Studies in Honor of Jouette M. Bassler*, ed. Calvin J. Roetzel and Robert L. Foster (New Testament Monographs 22; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2007), 20.

[64] McKinlay, *Troubling Women and Land*, 60.

[65] Nelson, "What is Achsah Doing in Judges?," 21.

[66] McKinlay, "Meeting Achsah on Achsah's Land," *The Bible and Critical Theory* 5.3 (2009): 6–7; *Troubling Women and Land*, 68.

[67] Frances Porter and Charlotte Macdonald, *"My Hand Will Write What My Heart Dictates": The Unsettled Lives of Women in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand as Revealed to Sisters, Family and Friends* (Auckland: Auckland University Press with Bridget Williams Books, 1996), 138.

[68] Porter and Macdonald, *"My Hand Will Write"*, 139.

[69] So Alexander Rofé, "Clan Sagas as a Source in Settlement Traditions," in *"A Wise and Discerning Mind": Essays in Honor of Burke O. Long*, ed. Saul M. Olyan and Robert C. Culley (Brown Judaic Studies 125; Providence, RI: Brown University, 2000), 203; Ann E. Killebrew, *Biblical Peoples and Ethnicity: An Archaeological Study of Egyptians, Canaanites, Philistines, and Early Israel, 1300–1100* BCE (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2005), 184, suggests various "nonindigenous groups mentioned in the biblical narrative … may have formed an essential element" of Late Bronze Age Israel. See also Zecharai Khallai, "The Beginnings of Israel: A Methodological Working Hypothesis," *IEJ* 59.2 (2009): 196, noting the Kenites and Kenizzites "are related to the inheriting nations," posits this "reflecting a historical process of absorption of indigenous elements."

[70] Susanne Scholz, "Judges," in *Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A Newsom, Sharon Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley (third rev. and updated ed.; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 116, also asking whether this assimilation implies "immigrants … do what Israel could not do."

[71] Jo Smith and Stephen Turner, "Indigenous Inhabitations and the Colonial Present," in *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies*, ed. Huggan, 278, with reference to Ghassan Hag's 2004 paper "On Loving Dead Others: Colonialism and Social Necrophilia" presented at a conference in Melbourne University.

[72] Kim, "Is There an "Anticonquest" Ideology in the Book of Judges?" 115, 127. He suggests Judges is "a double-edged sword," read as either an "imperializing" or "liberatory" text.

[73] Diana Vikander Edelman and Ehud Ben Zvi, eds., "Introduction," chap. in *Remembering Biblical Figures in the Late Persian and Early Hellenistic Periods: Social Memory and Imagination* **(**Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), x.

[74] Ehud Ben Zvi, "An Introduction and Invitation to Join the Conversation about Cities and Memory," in *Memory and the City in Ancient Israel*, ed. Diana V. Edelman and Ehud Ben Zvi (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 3.

[75] Gaétane-Diane Forget, "Navigating 'Deuteronomistic History' as Cultural Memory," *Religion & Theology* 17 (2010): 9.

[76] Michael Rothberg, "Remembering Back: Cultural Memory, Colonial Legacies and Postcolonial Studies," in *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies*, ed. Graham Huggan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 365.

[77] Patrick Evans, *The Long Forgetting: Post-colonial Literary Culture in New Zealand* (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2007), 40–1.

[78] The reference to Kiriat-Sepher, "the city of books," in Achsah's narrative may be an exception here. See Danna Nolan Fewell, "Deconstructive Criticism: Achsah and the (E)razed City of Writing," in *Judges & Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Gale A. Yee (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 131–2.

[79] Rothberg, "Remembering Back," 364.

[80] Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, eds., *Reading from this Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective* (vol. 2; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995).

[81] Musa W. Dube, "Introduction: The Scramble for Africa as the Biblical Scramble for Africa: Postcolonial Perspectives," in *Postcolonial Perspectives on African Biblical Interpretations*, ed. Musa W. Dube, Andrew M. Mbuvi, and Dora R. Mbuwayesango (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2012), 15.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Madipoane Masenya, “Anything New under the Sun of African Biblical Hermeneutics in South African Old Testament Scholarship? Incarnation, Death and Resurrection of the Word in Africa,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 36.1 (2015): 3.

[84] Laura E. Donaldson, “The Sign of Orpah: Reading Ruth Through Native Eyes,” in *Ruth and Esther*, ed. Athalya Brenner (A Feminist Companion to the Bible; Second Series 3; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 143.

[85] Sonia Kwok Wong, “The Birth, Early Life, and Commission of Moses: A Reading from Post-Handover Hong Kong,” in *Exodus and Deuteronomy*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Gale A. Yee (texts@contexts; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2012), 155.

[86] Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, “Whose Text Is It?” *JBL* 127.1 (2008): 17.

[87] Jione Havea, “Sitting Jonah with Job: Resailing Intertextuality,” *The Bible & Critical Theory* 12.1 (2016): 96 n. 3.

[88] Stephen D. Moore, “Questions of Biblical Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, or, the Postcolonial and the Postmodern,” in *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections*, ed. Moore and Segovia, 82, referring to Ahmad, *In Theory, Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1992).

[89] Sugirtharajah in D. N. Premnath, “Margins and Mainstream: An Interview with R. S. Sugirtharajah,” in *Border Crossings: Cross-Cultural Hermeneutics*, ed. D. N. Premnath (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 157.

[90] Malebogo Kgalemang, “A Postcolonial Feminist Reading of Mark 14–16,” in *Postcolonial Perspectives on African Biblical Interpretations*, ed. Musa W. Dube, Andrew M. Mbuvi, and Dora R. Mbuwayesango (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2012), 442.

CHAPTER 16

ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF A FEMINIST BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS OF MIGRATION

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MILLIONS of people have left their homes worldwide due to ongoing military conflict and war, political and social persecution, climate change, or economic deprivation. Of the 65.3 million people forcibly displaced in the world,[1] women and children are in the numerical majority, especially within certain regions, such as Syria.[2] According to U.N. statistics, 244 million international migrants lived abroad worldwide in 2016, a 42 percent increase since 2000.[3] Some estimates suggest that the numbers of climate migrants might rise to 1 billion people by 2050.[4] This fact raises the question how feminist Bible interpreters address the global migration and refugee crisis as an exegetical problem in the neoliberal era that has put so many people on the move. Ought feminist (and non-feminist) Bible scholars, whether they are secular, Christian, or Jewish, not reflect on the purpose and rationale of reading biblical literature in light of the pervasive social dislocation of so many people who often, though not always, hail from Bible-reading and Bible-affiliated religious traditions? The answer must be a resounding "yes" despite the considerable hesitation of Western countries to welcome migrating people. Reasons for the hesitation are complex and should not be dismissed offhandedly, and the concerns of hosting populations need to be taken seriously as well. At the same time, the hesitation should also indicate that feminist Bible scholars need to exegete the Bible in the

context of the massive social dislocations taking place in our time.

This essay discusses some of the hermeneutical and methodological issues related to developing a feminist biblical hermeneutics informed by the contemporary global humanitarian crisis of migration. Three main sections structure the discussion. The first section examines how feminist Bible interpreters have dealt with the topic of migration. The second section presents reasons for establishing a sociological framework as part of a feminist biblical hermeneutics of migration. The third section considers how feminist biblical scholars might proceed methodologically, as they connect their work to the global migration and refugee crisis of the neoliberal era. The conclusion reiterates the need for a feminist biblical hermeneutics of migration.

The Topic of Migration in Feminist Biblical Studies

Although the Bible is a book about migrants and refugees and although migration is generally recognized as being "basically gendered,"[5] feminist scholars have not flocked to biblical texts, biblical characters, or the biblical interpretation history with migrants and refugees in mind.[6] Still, some feminist exegetes bring migration to the forefront of their readings, relying on various strategies to highlight the issue in their interpretations. Several approaches stand out in such studies on biblical migration.[7]

Many feminist exegetes focus on individual biblical characters, such as Sarah, Ruth, and Esther, or even the male-performing prophet Ezekiel.[8] These interpretations sympathize with the fates of biblical migrants, lifting up their stories in caring ways. Some of them recognize that the individualistic focus is "less than satisfactory"[9] because it presents migration as a personal issue, even though most migrants leave their native lands because of societal, political, economic, or cultural difficulties. Often famine or war make them decide to leave the land in which they had grown up. Yet the individualized approach is popular on the grassroots level because this approach enables readers to identify with biblical women migrants as sympathetic figures.[10]

Some feminist interpreters modify the individual focus by correlating migrating women in the Bible to the experiences of contemporary women migrants. For instance, Athalya Brenner places the biblical character of Ruth in

analogy to migrant women's experiences in contemporary Israel.[11] Brenner rejects romanticized approaches to Ruth that describe her as a daughter-in-law loving her mother-in-law so much that the younger woman chooses to follow the older woman wherever the journey will take them. Brenner criticizes the exegetical tendency that idealizes Ruth's story as a love story, proposing:

> Let us ask ourselves why, in our interpretations of the Bible, we are often biased in favor of finding spiritual motives over practical ones; why, wherever we can, we value imagined sentiments of religiosity over the primary will to survive; why reading as if for today does not encompass today's lessons as applicable to texts of the past and vice versa; why we have to idealize not only Ruth but the Bible as a whole.[12]

Brenner urges interpreters to recognize that Ruth migrates to the land of her mother-in-law to improve her economic and social status.[13] She is like migrant women in Israel. As Brenner explains, today's migrant women leave their native countries to improve their "eating, sheltering, multiplying, speaking, and breathing."[14]

Brenner also observes that Ruth is in a better situation than contemporary migrant women in Israel. The latter are forced to leave their home countries for financial reasons whereas Ruth leaves voluntarily. Yet like contemporary migrant women, Ruth remains a foreigner. She is "always called 'Moabite'" and she is never fully integrated into the host society. Like them, she performs manual labor although she is probably luckier than them. She marries a rich local man who improves her civil and legal status. In addition, she enhances her social status in the patriarchal host society by giving birth to a son.[15] Still, the new mother immediately disappears from the narrative after having fulfilled her duty as a woman in a patriarchal world. She remains a migrant who is "never an 'in' person,"[16] a fate she shares with female migrants in contemporary Israel. Brenner thus urges feminist exegetes to read Ruth's story in alignment with today's migrant women and to reject romanticized readings of this biblical book.

Other feminist exegetes reverse the order by reading contemporary immigration issues in light of biblical migration stories. For instance, Dorothea Erbele-Küster considers Ruth "from the perspective of immigration and gender issue" because, in her view, this biblical book "provides new insights for the sociopolitical discussions in Germany and in the Netherlands, where I live."[17] Arguing on the basis of a linguistic-historical approach, Erbele-Küster explains that the noun, *ger*, refers to "an alien sojourner in a foreign country." The noun should be translated as "immigrant"[18] because in ancient Israel a *ger* "lives under restricted legal rights,"[19] cannot own land, and is often confined to the

limited protections given to orphans, widows, and the poor. Ruth's father-in-law, Elimelech, who is originally from Judah, is such a *ger*. Although Erbele-Küster compares contemporary with Israelite experiences of migration, she recognizes that Ruth's attempt to assimilate into a foreign culture is not a "practical and useful model for [today's] multireligious society."[20] Ruth is a second-class citizen in the host society because the biblical imaginary does not view "integration" as "a dialectical process in which each other's differences have to be respected."[21] In the Bible, immigrants never integrate; they remain foreigners. For instance, in the book of Ruth the town's older women refuse "female solidarity," excluding "the foreign woman," although "Ruth … shows fidelity to her old mother-in-law Naomi."[22]

Another distinction between biblical and contemporary ideas about migration makes the correlation difficulty. Erbele-Küster explains that immigration is not "an economic problem" in biblical migration stories but an issue with "ethnic and religious implications."[23] In other words, biblical migrants are excluded for ethnic and religious reasons but not for economic ones. Different from Brenner, then, Erbele-Küster does not read biblical migration stories as tales in which female characters seek to improve their material conditions like contemporary migrants. Rather, biblical migration stories articulate gendered migration experiences in which foreigners remain "other" due to their different ethnicities and religious traditions. Erbele-Küster, however, does not explain further how this biblical view reinforces contemporary positions about migration that are often based on stereotypical thinking about ethnicity and religious difference.

Several feminist biblical scholars employ yet another approach to migration. They correlate biblical views of migration to contemporary geopolitical contexts. Two essays in an anthology about biblical migration from Asian perspectives illustrate this approach. One essay, written by Yoon Kyung Lee, relates the situation of the population in the Persian Yehud to contemporary South Korea, especially as the situation in both contexts pertains to the contestation of intermarriage and multiculturalism. Lee grounds her interpretation in a historical-literary method to depict a nativist position that justifies socio-political inequality among native and migrant populations with ethnic arguments. In the Persian Yehud, the nativist position appears in Ezra's and Nehemiah's discussions on intermarriage. Lee finds this position articulated indirectly in Third Isaiah even though these biblical chapters advance universalizing ideas about humans in relation to God. The universalizing ideas, however, indicate that in the Persian Yehud not everybody accepted essentialized notions of ethnicity with which people were asked to stay away from foreigners and to keep their

religious purity intact. Lee suggests that biblical prohibitions of intermarriage attempted to eradicate the native population's acceptance of "foreigners." In other words, in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah the prohibition of intermarriage counteracted the practice of intermarriage among the Yehud native and migrant populations. Lee grounds her historical-literary hypothesis within contemporary South Korea where she sees a similar dynamic at work. South Korea is a country on the "threshold of a multicultural society, specifically in terms of ethnicity,"[24] in which anti-migrant views oppose the native population's mingling with migrants. Said differently, the ethnocentric notion of prohibiting migrants from becoming part of society must be read as an apologetic rhetoric that upholds exclusionary rules to eradicate the native population's tolerant behavior.

The second essay, written by Yani Yoo, also connects biblical migration stories with a contemporary geopolitical context. She recognizes the book of Esther as an empire-friendly story that nurtures colonial oppression similar to what occurs in Korea today.[25] In Yoo's interpretation, the book of Esther is "an empire story promoting its interests, rather than a survival story of the suffering minorities" and "[t]he narrator's desire was disguised in the name of survival of oppressed minorities."[26] Yoo finds a similar dynamic executed in her native Korea in which:

> the Korean government divides its people and takes advantage of the conflict among them. The empire encourages its people to be in the game of power and money so that people do not dream of rebellion. They would rather dream of becoming emperors. The empire and its people are conspirators in the money and power game.[27]

In such a geopolitical climate, migration becomes an easy target for elites who put various population groups against each other.

For Yee, the book of Esther ought to be read with this political insight in mind to deconstruct empire desires "in twenty-first century Korea."[28] Readers will then recognize the biblical book as "an empire story promoting its interests, rather than a survival story of the Diaspora."[29] The story emphasizes power, food, and sex to legitimize imperial, especially male imperial, desire. The characterization of Haman, Esther, and Mordecai as migrants reinforces the notion of the empire as the foundation of life. In fact, the empire is so strong that it even tells narratives in which the oppressed population defeats the empire. The book of Esther imagines "a few who made it to the top of the mainstream society,"[30] giving everybody the idea of success. Yet this dream guarantees ultimate power to the elite strata of society. Yoo finds this rhetorical strategy also at work in contemporary Korea although, in her view, the book of Esther

illustrates why this strategy must be rejected. It is empire-friendly for which migrants pay a heavy price. They violate their own rights for the illusive dream of success in a foreign land. It demands that they betray themselves.

Yet another feminist approach to the topic of migration in the Bible stands out. The South African *bosadi* Old Testament scholar, Madipoane Maseynya (Ngwan'a Mphahlele), articulates this approach in a discussion of Jer. 21:1–10.[31] Maseynya proposes that migration and exile do not necessarily require people to move beyond their native territories because "the place of exile can occur even within one's own territory,"[32] as contemporary African and South African women know very well. Maseynya explains that African women experience themselves as "foreigners" in their own land because of the denigration of their culture in favor of "the hegemonic Western Eurocentric culture"[33] prevalent even in postcolonial Africa. They live in "socio-economic exile," making them wonder whether they "thirst most of all to be liberated from [their] colour, from [their] class, [their] ignorance of [their] tradition, from economic domination."[34] Maseynya asserts that "life-denying forces typify one's exilic state," and so "injustice and oppression are also 'places of exile.'"[35] With this hermeneutical insight in mind, she interprets Jer. 21:1–10 as a recommendation for life in exile.

Maseynya's approach does not focus on individual female characters, and it does not correlate biblical women's stories with contemporary migration. It also does not highlight topics of migration, such as intermarriage or empire language as the recommended focus of (feminist) biblical commentary on migration. Rather, Maseynya grounds her analysis in a *bosadi* hermeneutics, examining whether the exhortation in Jeremiah can and should be applied to South African women's experiences of being exiled within their own country. She observes that the biblical passage gives "a choice between two 'evils': either to remain in the city and face death or to escape death by trading their lives through submitting to the enemy."[36] In other words, survival depends on the listeners in Jerusalem if they are able to accept "displacement in a foreign country."[37] In fact, verses 8–9 recommend that listeners "choose exile and live."[38] Maseynya agrees with historical critics who argue that late exilic and post-exilic writers in Babylon composed this passage in Jeremiah. When they wrote Jer. 21:1–10, they justified the exilic experience as a strategy of survival decades after the Babylonian exile had occurred.

Yet Maseynya questions whether this line of thinking about the Babylonian exile should be accepted as "the only exile story available then."[39] She knows that exile does not begin by leaving one's country; it occurs much earlier.

Masenya explains:

> In the case of the African people in South Africa, there is a group of people who, since the colonial and apartheid eras, have come to embrace what is means to survive. That group is African women. They have been victimized not only by Western imperialist forces but also patriarchy within the broader (global) culture as well as the African culture.[40]

In her view, African women should not adhere to the recommendation of Jer. 21:1–10 and they should not surrender to imperial power. Rather, they need to "read with caution" those passages that were written "from the perspectives of the powerful."[41] Most importantly, they need to look for the "invisible exile stories,"[42] asking:

> What if the exhortation to seek life in exile is ideologically rooted? What if these words formed part of the strategy of the Babylonian exiles, who had access to the final formation of Jeremiah, to overlook every Jew who did not experience the Babylonian exile? What if there was an intentional move by the editors to curb any participation of such Jews in the shaping of the future of their people?[43]

In short, Maseynya proposes that a *bosadi* reading does not follow the advice of Jer. 21:1–10 because "[t]he invitation to choose exile, a place of injustice and oppression, and live, even at the risk of giving one's life as booty for war, cannot be a helpful one to African women not only in South Africa, but also on the rest of the African continent."[44] African-South African women, who are conscious of their marginalization and suppression, reject the ideology of this biblical passage as unhelpful "towards the transformation of their exilic states."[45] They have to tell their own exile stories so that they will come to understand "reality."[46] Coming from an exilic South African feminist Bible scholar, this advice is powerful. Her explanations demonstrate that a feminist biblical hermeneutics of migration turns into an all-encompassing project that analyzes oppression and injustice in the world.

In sum, feminist exegetes use different hermeneutical approaches in their studies on migration in the Bible. Many interpreters focus on individual biblical women figures to bring attention to migration in the Bible. Some scholars correlate the situation of today's migrants to biblical women migrants. Other exegetes reverse the direction by connecting biblical texts about female migrants to contemporary settings. Still other interpreters relate ethnocentric and empire-friendly positions, articulated in various biblical books, to contemporary geopolitical contexts in which migration features prominently. One feminist interpreter offers perhaps the most creative and exegetically beneficial approach.

Defined as a *bosadi* hermeneutic, this approach not only employs a hermeneutic of suspicion to biblical texts about exile, but it also highlights the invisible exiles of African and South African women in their own countries while socio-political, economic, and religious marginalization and oppression have battered people for a very long time. Women in particular face exile in their daily lives. Thus, the *bosadi* hermeneutics recognizes that experiences of alienation, exile, and migration occur not only in "foreign" lands but also at home. This insight is important for the development of a feminist biblical hermeneutics of migration.

Interestingly, feminist interpreters have yet to offer a comprehensive analysis of migration in the Bible or study the interpretation history on biblical migration to explain the field's reticence to engage the topic. This essay proposes strategies to remedy this lacuna in (feminist) biblical studies. It suggests moving feminist biblical studies beyond selected text studies and to develop a comprehensive agenda for studying migration in biblical studies. More specifically, I propose developing a sociological framework within which to read the Bible as migration literature, with a focus on gender. The next section explains how to create such a sociological framework as part of a feminist migration hermeneutics.

Toward a Sociological Framework for a Feminist Migration Hermeneutics

In a world in which people, especially women and children, are on the move more than ever before in human history, feminist biblical exegetes need to develop a sociological framework for their exegetical work. As Davina Lopez and Todd Penner express it so well, we need to investigate "the epistemological effects of scholarly discourses and the ethical implications embedded therein."[47] We need to understand biblical interpretations as past and present contributions to the geopolitical, cultural, and religious discourses and practices on migration. Hence, feminist biblical scholarship must analyze how interpreters have indirectly or directly participated in the socio-political, economic, and religious politics and legislation about migration. Conceptualized as sociological-framed scholarship, feminist biblical exegesis needs to expose biblical interpretations not as "true" or "false," "objective" or "subjective," and "exegetical" or "eisegetical," but as ideological constructs coming from somewhere and being created by socially located readers. In the context of migration, sociologically framed investigations must concern themselves with migratory discourses on

and about the Bible.

This kind of sociological analysis assumes that interpreters have already made culturally, politically, and religiously charged claims about the world when they construct biblical meanings. After all, interpreters articulate their readings within the world even when they do not openly disclose assumptions, politics, and belief systems. A sociologically framed analysis makes obvious who says what, how they say what they say, what their sayings mean in the context of the interpretative enterprise, and how interpreters align with worldly power dynamics. Accordingly, a sociologically framed analysis describes, investigates, and evaluates ideologies of power as part and parcel of exegetical discourse. Thus, crucially, a sociologically framed analysis encourages biblical research to move from a text-centric to a cultural-analytical project, or as Vincent L. Wimbush puts it, a sociologically framed analysis opens up the field to the "complexity of social dynamics as social textu(r)alization."[48]

In addition, this kind of sociologically framed analysis resists assimilating the academic study of the Bible into the geopolitical, cultural, or religious status quo that ignores migration as a relevant topic. The sociological framework changes the function, purpose, and agenda of biblical hermeneutics. It ensures that the nexus between reading and society, reading and culture, and reading and politics is not relegated to an invisible place in the past. The sociological framework teaches that meaning-making processes are contextual and socially located, and never universal, objective, or value-neutral. This framework exposes assertions of singular, monolithic, and unilateral biblical meaning as hermeneutical attempts to obfuscate readerly interests in the world. A sociologically defined analysis thus advances an epistemology that challenges claims of objectivity, universality, and value-neutrality, and it promotes textual fluidity, multiplicity, and "creolization." A sociology of biblical hermeneutics makes clear that biblical interpretations participate in hermeneutically dynamic and politically and religiously charged conversations over socio-cultural practices.

In other words, a feminist migration hermeneutics of the Bible that is conceptualized within a sociological framework does not further perpetuate the colonizing hermeneutical assumptions of the field, as they have developed since the eighteenth century. The literary critic Edward W. Said explained that "[t]he intellectual's role is … to challenge and defeat both an imposed silence and the normalized quiet of unseen power wherever and whenever possible."[49] When Bible scholars were at their best, they critiqued hegemonically positioned religious authority. They challenged socio-political demands for complicity, acquiescence, and silence. Although the field of biblical studies advanced due to

its accommodation to European colonialism,[50] this accommodation also enabled historical Bible critics to challenge the church's doctrinal reading of the Bible. By employing historical criticism, Bible scholars demonstrated that biblical texts are not divine but human words to be critically investigated as such. Consequently, biblical scholars brought the question about the Bible's authorship to the center of biblical exegesis, and the quest for the Bible's authorial meaning has occupied generations of exegetes ever since.

The various answers given over several hundreds of years have successfully torn away the Bible from religious control, so much so that nowadays biblical scholarship is mostly identified with the quest for historical meaning. Even religious organizations, grounded in scriptural authority, accept this quest as their own. Other events that deeply impacted Old Testament scholarship have further contributed to the importance of the historical-antiquarian approach with its affiliated epistemological assumptions. Yet these developments are not usually remembered as having emerged from a stance of resistance to religious hegemony. Yet at the same time, this resistance was enabled by accepting and even by nurturing colonial superiority. Thus, as geopolitical structures changed, historical Bible readings have come to serve imperial powers in society. This dynamic is still at work. Nowadays most biblical scholarship does not support resistance to the "unseen powers" in neoliberal, technocratic, and market-driven societies that engage in perpetual war, military engagement, and socio-economic exploitation of the *hoi polloi*. Most importantly, as Schüssler Fiorenza has argued so persistently, biblical scholarship stands in an ambiguous tradition of fostering democracy and democratic processes.[51] As biblical scholarship has been largely complicit with the ethos of empire, far too often biblical scholars leave unaddressed and unchallenged sociopolitical and economic exploitation, injustice, and oppression. Migration illustrates the field's ongoing silence about injustice in the world. A feminist hermeneutics of migration, sociologically framed, uncovers these and many other power structures in biblical interpretation to contribute on the intellectual and exegetical levels to justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.

In sum, a sociologically framed approach to a feminist biblical hermeneutics of migration assumes that interpretations are always context specific and socially located. They are never mere descriptions of a long-gone past or mere, harmless, and innocent expressions of personal piety in a world in which at least one-fifth of humanity will be on the move by 2050. While the sociologically framed approach examines, compares and contrast, highlights, and evaluates readerly assumptions found in the biblical interpretation history, it also takes a stance. In

the face of "this age of heightened transnational migration,"[52] a feminist hermeneutics of migration is neither silent about nor complicit with the various expressions of cooptation, acquiescence, and complicity into the structures of neoliberal or even authoritarian oppression. Rather, it sheds light on the implications of biblical exegesis. It contributes to eliminating the pervasive acceptance of migratory injustice that migrants experience globally. The next section elaborates further on the methodological implications for developing a sociological framework that ought to be the basis for a feminist biblical hermeneutics of migration.

Methodological Considerations for a Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics on Migration

What should be clear by now is that a feminist biblical hermeneutics on migration does not merely retell biblical migrant stories of women, whether they are Eve, Hagar, Sarah, Rebecca, Miriam, Ruth, or Esther. Rather, as millions of people migrate around the globe, hermeneutical and epistemological processes for reading the Bible must change. Said differently, the current context of mass migration and refugees ought to modify the framework, purpose, function, and agenda of biblical studies as a *scholarly* enterprise. The contemporary neoliberal era alters how the field ought to engage from within its social location.[53] Context should also inform the pedagogical purpose and vision of teaching the Bible in institutions of higher education. A changed curriculum is important because the higher-education curriculum filters down to high school, middle school, and elementary school curricula. Teaching the Bible according to a nineteenth-century paradigm is pedagogically, ethically, and exegetically irresponsible when epistemological, hermeneutical, and methodological assumptions must adapt to the geopolitical, cultural, and religious demands of the twenty-first century. Faced with today's migratory movements worldwide, the scholarly agenda must be transformed to foster intellectual, pedagogical, and real-world relevance of biblical studies as an academic endeavor.

How then should we read biblical texts? I propose to approach this central question on the theoretical level. We must clarify the methodology of biblical studies. The deliberations of Nicolas Bouriaud, a French curator, are pertinent in this regard, as he describes the characteristic features of our post-postmodern era

in a little book entitled *The Radicant*.[54] Bouriaud observes that we live in the time of the *radicant*. This term comes from botany and refers to plants "taking root on, or above, the ground; rooting from the stem, as the trumpet creeper and the ivy."[55] A radicant is "an organism that grows its roots and adds new ones as it advances."[56] The term "radicant" captures what is going on nowadays. Like radicant plants, people wander from place to place. Previously they lived somewhere else, but they put down their roots anew migrating from country to country. Like radicant plants, many people move from here to there growing roots along the way. Multiple belonging is thus a characteristic of the neoliberal era producing enormous movements of people. Bouriaud states:

> To be radicant means setting one's roots in motion, staging them in heterogeneous contexts and formats, denying them the power to completely define one's identity, translating ideas, transcoding images, transplanting behaviors, exchanging rather than imposing. What if twenty-first-century culture were invented with those works that set themselves the task of effacing their origin in favor of a multitude of simultaneous or successive enrootings? This process of obliteration is part of the condition of the wanderer. …[57]

A feminist biblical hermeneutics of migration takes seriously the position of the radicant, the wanderer, and the migrant who find themselves "living in more or less voluntary exile."[58] Refugees, professional nomads, and irregular workers are everywhere[59] and "increasingly commonplace," as are an "unprecedented circulation of goods and services" and "the formation of transnational political entities,"[60] the latter also known as corporations. Ours is the era of the global mobilization of people, things, and transnational entities, not to mention the global web of data infrastructures.

Besides proposing to conceptualize migration as a radicant, Bouriaud also considers "the question of identity [as] most pressing for immigrant communities in the most globalized countries."[61] He observes perceptively that wanderers from culture to culture and land to land suffer because they hold on to their roots, their pre-immigrant identities.[62] That is why second and third generations find life in the new land so much easier than the migrating generation. The younger ones do not so vividly remember their native lands, their roots, the "mythologized 'origin' against an integrating and homogenizing 'soil.'"[63] They mix and match multiple identities, develop new roots, and adapt to the new soil more easily than their parents or grant-parents. What is needed on the theoretical level is not "set[ting] one fixed root against another,"[64] as religious and non-religious fundamentalists do increasingly on a global level. Rather, what is needed is an appreciation of multiple locations, various influences, shifting

preferences, not played out against each other but nurtured by "a multitude of simultaneous or successive enrootings."[65] In other words, moving, shifting, and multiple locations, influences, and preferences characterize our age, the era of altermodernity or post-postmodernity. In "radicantity" we "engage in productive dialogue with a variety of different contexts."[66] These conversations and life experiences do not seek exclusive origins, histories, or roots, because nowadays people develop portable identities that "become more important than their local reality."[67]

The methodological position of the radicant creates fragmentary, shifting, transitory, and dynamic sensibilities that unbind from essentialist notions of monolithic origins and pre-determined endpoints. It also puts the focus on the subject doing the reading, and it fosters inextricable links between biblical meanings and the Bible's readers. Thus understood, radicant biblical exegesis turns into a significant practice against any kind of fundamentalist and right-wing agenda because it rejects essentializing as well as ontologically structured and monolithically defined exegesis. This kind of biblical interpretation also contributes to an ethics of resistance that nurtures opposition to the globalizing forces of capitalist consumption and economic standardization. It takes seriously the pluralistic experiences and aspirations of Bible-reading communities, helping those Bible readers to gain strength in spite of neoliberal, technocractic, and market-driven power arrangements in the world. In sum, the position of the radicant ought to be the methodological stance with which to read the Bible and to study biblical interpretation histories. Its goal is to understand why and how we got to where we are today and how to move beyond the increasingly inhumane, ecologically devastating, and spiritually numbing status quo worldwide.

Studying the Bible as a Literary Tapestry of Gendered Migration Stories: Concluding Remarks

I want to end on a personal note about the development of a feminist biblical hermeneutics of migration. I grew up with the stories of my grandmother who was a refugee ("Flüchtling") with three little children—my two uncles and my mother—in 1944 to 1945. As a child, I believed the entire life of my grandmother had been the life of a refugee or, as we say in today's clinical

language, an “internally displaced person.”[68] It was predictable when my granny would get into the mood of telling her refugee stories, right after the big Sunday lunch meal and before taking her afternoon nap. Her stories followed an inherent order, but she always welcomed questions. I was perhaps 16 years old when I realized that her refugee journey lasted about six months, and prior to her enormous ordeal fleeing from Silesia to Bavaria, she had enjoyed a “normal” youth before the war. On her journey she was almost killed in one of the refugee camps. Her stories were intense, frightening, and not for the faint-hearted listener. Her stories of being “auf der Flucht” (on her escape journey) and a “Flüchtling” (refugee) with three small children (one was a 3-year-old toddler) have become deeply engraved sensibilities even within me who grew up as part of the third generation of post-Holocaust Germans. Feelings of uncertainty, fear, and trauma never completely disappear for the adults who lived through them. Even the third generation knows of them on the gut level. I am thus convinced that the development of a feminist hermeneutics of migration is crucial. The current and worldwide rise of religious and non-religious fundamentalism and political authoritarianism needs to be understood as part of the other side of the coin of migration. In this age of migration, everybody will benefit from accepting and cherishing what so many people find so difficult: ambiguity, flexibility, elasticity, fluidity, malleability, mutability, and opaqueness. In short, we must learn to read like radicants, wherever we are, because so many people in the past and present live like them.

A note of caution: This kind of learning cannot take place when people have not yet survived their migratory ordeals. Perhaps it can take place only afterwards, when people know where they will sleep and where their children will attend school. We have to be patient because the alternative is unacceptable and far too destructive. The singular, exclusionary, and monolithic fixation on One Truth, One (biblical) Meaning, and One Way of living does not open up a viable future for biblical exegesis or any other human activity. Past and present authoritarian regimes illustrate the incredible damage that this kind of repressive insistence does to humanity and planet earth.

Biblical scholars have much to contribute to the ongoing learning processes toward the acceptance of the “Other,” the migrant. We can develop an exegetical framework beyond asserted singular (biblical) meanings either placed into the distant past or articulated in individualized, romanticized, and privatized piety. As all of humanity originates from migration and as the Bible itself is one “literary tapestry woven from the stories of migrants,”[69] feminist biblical exegetes need to affirm theoretically the centrality of migration in biblical

studies, or as Jorge E. Castillo Guerra explains in his quest for a theology of migration: we need to "use migration as a criterion for [exegetical] self-understanding (identity), methodological options, and epistemology."[70] The development of a feminist biblical hermeneutics of migration goes far beyond a rehearsal of biblical women's migrating stories. At its best it transforms the hermeneutical and methodological parameters of biblical exegesis beyond a text-fetishized approach that excludes the world from its purview.

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[1] For this number, see, e.g., Kristin Myers, Refugee, "Migrant, IDP: What's the Difference?" (February 2, 2017); available at http://www.concernusa.org/story/refugee-migrant-idp-whats-the-difference/?utm:source=adwords&utm:medium=ppc&utm:campaign=with-refugees&utm:content=IDP-explainer&gclid=CKrfrsychNMCFQysaQodiBAIDg. For additional statistics on migrants and refugees in the world, see The U.N. Refugee Agency at http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html.

[2] The U.N. produces an annual International Migration Report; for the most recent one from 2016, see here: http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/docs/MigrationR For a commentary, see, e.g., the report here: http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2017/feb/02/keith-ellison/rep-keith-ellison-correct-demographic-overview-syr/.

[3] See http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html.

[4] Baher Kamal, "Climate Migrants Might Reach One Billion by 2050," *Inter Press Service News*

Agency (August 21, 2017): http://www.ipsnews.net/2017/08/climate-migrants-might-reach-one-billion-by-2050/.

[5] Gemme Tulud Cruz, "It Cuts Both Ways: Religion and Filipina Domestic Workers in Hong Kong," in *Gender, Religion, and Migration: Pathways of Integration*, ed. Glenda Tibe Bonifacio and Vivienne Sm. Angeles (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 6.

[6] It should be emphasized that the marginalization of migration does not only occur in feminist biblical studies but also in the field at large. Many books dealing with migration and exile in biblical texts do not include works on biblical migrant women or the issue of gender; see, e.g., Mark J. Boda, Frank Ritchel Ames, John Ahn, and Mark Leuchter, eds., *The Prophets Speak on Forced Migration* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2015); Van Thanh Nguyen and John M. Prior, eds., *God's People on the Move: Biblical and Global Perspectives on Migration and Mission* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014); J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, Andrea Fröchtling, and Andreas Kunz-Lübcke (eds.), *Babel Is Everywhere: Migrant Readings from Africa, Europe and Asia* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2013); James K. Hoffmeier, *The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens, and the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009). See also for a lack of discussions on gender the journal issue devoted to "Immigration" in *Insights: The Faculty Journal of Austin Seminary* 124.2 (Spring 2009): 2–39. Also a discussion on Hispanic immigration in the United States does not reference gender; see M. Daniel Carroll R., "The Bible, the Church, and Human Rights in Contemporary Debates about Hispanic Immigration in the United States," *Latin American Theology* 2.1 (2007): 161–84. For the inclusion of one article on gender in the field of migration studies in general, see Tristan Pearce, "Gender, Migration, and (Global) Environmental Change," in *Routledge Handbook of Environmental Displacement and Migration*, ed. Robert McLeman and François Gemenne (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 125–34.

[7] This essay does not include feminist postcolonial biblical scholarship because these works focus on geopolitics more than on migration. For a comprehensive analysis of feminist postcolonial scholarship on the Bible, see my essay, "Postcolonial Biblical Criticism and Feminist Studies," in *Oxford Handbook on Postcolonial Biblical Criticism*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); available at: https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190888459.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780190888459-e-12.

[8] See, e.g., Kwok Pui-lan, "Finding a Home for Ruth: Gender, Sexuality, and the Politics of Otherness," in *New Paradigms for Bible Study: The Bible in the Third Millennium*, ed. Robert M. Fowler, Edith Blumhofer, and Fernando F. Segovia (New York, NY: T&T Clark International, 2004), 135–54; Jean-Pierre Ruiz, "Abram and Sarai Cross the Border: A Reading," chap. in *Readings from the Edges: The Bible and People on the Move* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 57–70; T. M. Lemos, "'They Have Become Women': Judean Diaspora and Postcolonial Theories of Gender and Migration," in *Social Theory and the Study of Israelite Religion: Essays in Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Saul M. Olyan (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2012), 81–109.

[9] Judith Gruber, "Remembering Borders: Notes toward a Theology of Migration," in *Migration as a Sign of the Times: Toward a Theology of Migration*, ed. Judith Gruber and Sigrid Rettenbacher (Leiden / Boston, MA: Brill/Rodopi, 2015), 91.

[10] See, e.g., Nellie Choi, ed., *Seeking Fullness of Life: Biblical Meditations on Women and Migration from Women around the Globe* (New York, NY: United Methodist Women, 2013); Bonnie Honig, "Ruth, the Model Emigrée: Mourning and the Symbolic Politics of Immigration," *Political Theory* 25.1 (1997): 112–36.

[11] Athalya Brenner, "From Ruth to the 'Global Woman': Social and Legal Aspects," *Interpretation* 64.2 (April 2010): 162–68. Earlier versions of Brenner's effort to read Ruth as a biblical migrant similar to migrants in contemporary Israel, see her "Ruth as a Foreign Worker and the Politics of Exogamy," in *A Feminist Companion to Ruth and Esther*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999),

158–62; “Was, wenn ich Rut bin?,” *Bibel und Kirche* 54.3 (1999): 117–20, 122. For a correlation of Ruth with the people of Hong Kong, see Sin-lung Tong, “The Key to Successful Migration? Rereading Ruth’s Confession (1:16–17) through the Lens of Bhabha’s Mimcry,” in *Reading Ruth in Asia*, ed. Jione Havea and Peter H. W. Lau (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2015), 35–46. Ton sums up her essay with this statement on p. 46: “The lens of Bhabha’s mimicry, nevertheless, allows us to see how a typically marginalized outsider survives possible struggles and perhaps even challenges the dominant culture. In this chapter, Ruth’s mimicry is taken as a source of imagination for Hong Kong people to rethink their relationship with China.” For a discussion on biblical dreams compared to dreams of Filipina migrant women in Hong Kong, see Wai Ching (Angela) Wong, “‘Same Bed, Different Dreams’: An Engendered Reading of Families in Migration in Genesis and Hong Kong,” in *Genesis*, ed. Athalya Brenner, Archie Chi Chung Lee, and Gale A. Yee (texts @ contexts; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 191–210.

[12] Ibid., 168. For another study of the book of Ruth in the context of migration, see Bridget Saladino Culpepper, “Locking Up: Ruth, Sexual Choices, Migration, and Women’s Struggle for Survival,” (Ph.D. thesis, Marylhurst University, 2008).

[13] For an overall contextual approach to the book of Ruth, see Havea and Lau, eds., *Reading Ruth in Asia*.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid., 167.

[16] Ibid. For a discussion of the insider/outsider dynamic of South African feminist biblical scholarship, see Madipoane Maseya (Ngawan’a Mphahlele), “For Ever Trapped? An African Voice on Insider/Outsider Dynamics within South African Old Testament Gender-Sensitive Frameworks,” *OTE* 27.1 (2014): 189–204.

[17] Dorothea Erbele-Küster, “Immigration and Gender Issues in the Book of Ruth,” *Voices from the Third World* 25.1–2 (June–December 2002): 32.

[18] Ibid., 33.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., 35.

[21] Ibid. For an opposite assessment, see Agnethe Siquans, “Foreignness and Poverty in the Book of Ruth: A Legal Way for a Poor Foreign Woman to Be Integrated into Israel,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128.3 (2009): 443–52.

[22] Ibid., 37.

[23] Ibid., 38.

[24] Yoon Kyung Lee, “Post Exilic Jewish Experience and Korean Multiculturalism,” in *Migration and Diaspora: Exegetical Voices from Northeast Asian Women*, ed. Hisako Kinukawa (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2014), 3–18, 15. Unfortunately, Lee’s discussion ends with a classic anti-Jewish Christian argument that regards Jesus as the superior bringer of social justice. Lee writes on p. 16 in the semi-last sentence: “Only when Jesus came did the issue of pure and impure blood reopen, and a remedy was found to be able to go forward.”

[25] Yani Yoo, “Desiring the Empire: Reading the Book of Esther in Twenty-first Century Korea,” in *Migration and Diaspora: Exegetical Voices from Northeast Asian Women*, ed. Hisako Kinukawa (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2014), 31–46. For a non-feminist, Latin American reading of the book of Esther, see Auiles Ernesto Martínez, “Mordechai and Esther: Migration Lessons from Persian Soil,” *Journal of Latin American Theology* 4.1 (2009): 16–50. Martínez identifies “migration” as “a powerful axis upon which the plot of Esther rests and moves.” He asserts that Esther and her uncle, Mordecai, are “*migrants* and, as a result, *foreigners*” when “we, as readers, see ourselves as people who constantly move from one place to

another or who at least adopt this viewpoint for a moment" (p. 19, p. 18). Yet Martinez's retelling does not adapt an explicitly feminist stance, and so his essay does not offer a feminist reading. Instead, the emphasis in his retelling is on "Forced Migration" (p. 21), "Integration to Persian Society and Upward Mobility" (p. 22), "Imperialism and its Socio-Political Structure" (p. 25), 'Majority-Minority Conflicts" (p. 28), "Ethnic Consciousness and Internal Solidarity (p. 38), "Social Privilege and Retaliation" (p. 41), and "Ritualizing the Journey" (p. 42). Considerations of gender, sexism, misogyny, or heteronormativity in their intersectional manifestations do not define Martinez's approach.

[26] Ibid., 45.

[27] Ibid., 46. The other essay, entitled "The Samaritan Woman from the Perspective of a Korean Divorcee," is written by Chanhee Heo who discusses the issue of divorce in the New Testament and in Korea.

[28] Ibid. 31.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Madipoane Maseynya (Ngwan'a Mphahlele), "Invisible Exiles? An African-South African Woman's Reconfiguration of 'Exile' in Jeremiah 21:1–10," *OTE* 20.3 (2007): 756–71. She defines a "bosadi" (womanhood) reading as being grounded in the lives and perspectives of black South African women; see, e.g., her explanations in "For Ever Trapped? An African Voice on Insider/Outsider Dynamics within South African Old Testament Gender-Sensitive Frameworks," *OTE* 27.1 (2014): 199–200.

[32] Ibid. 761.

[33] Ibid., 760.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid., 761.

[36] Ibid., 764.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid., 766.

[40] Ibid., 766–7.

[41] Ibid., 767.

[42] Ibid., 769.

[43] Ibid., 767.

[44] Ibid., 770.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Davina Lopez and Todd Penner, "Homelessness as a Way Home: A Methodological Reflection and Proposal," in *Holy Land as Homeland? Models for Constructing the Historic Landscapes of Jesus*, ed. Keith W. Whitelam (Social World of Biblical Antiquity 2.7; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), 166.

[48] Vincent L. Wimbush, "Interrupting the Spin: What Might Happen if African Americans Were to Become the Starting Point for the Academic Study of the Bible," *USQR* 52 (1998): 75.

[49] Edward W. Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press,

2004), 135.

[50] See my article in German entitled “Von der Dekolonisation deutschsprachiger Bibelexegese träumen,” in *Jerusalemer Theologisches Forum*, ed. Ulrich Winkler (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, forthcoming).

[51] See, e.g., Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Democratizing Biblical Studies: Toward an Emancipatory Educational Space* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

[52] Cruz, “It Cuts Both Ways: Religion and Filipina Domestic Workers in Hong Kong,” 5.

[53] That biblical scholarship has always engaged its context becomes clear in the study by Stephen D. Moore and Yvonne Sherwood, *The Invention of the Biblical Scholar: A Critical Manifesto* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011).

[54] Nicolas Bouriaud, *The Radicant* (New York, NY: Lucas & Sternberg, 2009).

[55] See http://www.encyclo.co.uk/meaning-of-Radicant [accessed April 12, 2017].

[56] Bouriaud, *The Radicant*, 22.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid., 21.

[59] Khalid Koser, *International Migration: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[60] Bouriaud, *The Radicant*, 21.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid., 22.

[66] Ibid., 106.

[67] Ibid., 32.

[68] See, e.g., Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Gil Loescher, Katy Long, and Nando Sigona, “Introduction: Refugee and Forced Migration Studies in Transition,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies*, ed. Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Gil Loescher, Katy Long, and Nando Sigona (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1–19.

[69] Leslie J. Hoppe, “Israel and Egypt: Relationships and Memory,” *The Bible Today* 45 (July–August 2007): 209.

[70] Jorge E. Castillo Guerra, “From the Faith and Life of a Migrant to a Theology of Migration and Intercultural *Convivencia*,” in *Migration as a Sign of the Times: Toward a Theology of Migration*, ed. Judith Gruber and Sigrid Rettenbacher (Leiden / Boston, MA: Brill/Rodopi, 2015), 125.

PART III

THE IMPACT OF (DIGITAL) MEDIA CULTURES ON FEMINIST BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

CHAPTER 17

THE BIBLE, WOMEN, AND VIDEO GAMES

LINDA S. SCHEARING

In the last decade, much has been written about the intersection between religion and video games.[1] Rachel Wagner, for example, suggests that there are at least four "lenses" through which one can examine this connection: religion in gaming (religious practices that show up in games), religion as gaming (emphasis on similarities between religion and gaming), gaming as religion (emphasis on fandom and community), and gaming in religion (religiously informed games).[2] But what about video games and the Bible? How can one explore this connection, especially as it concerns gender issues affecting women?

Video games are a rather complex genre. One way of categorizing them focuses on the role of the gamer. There are simulation games, although technically one could argue that all video games fall into this category. There are also strategy games, action games, and role-playing games.[3] While many of these games have distinct features, it is possible for a game to combine several. For instance, some games fall under multiple categories: as both an action game (e.g. first-person shooter) and a role-playing game. Another way to categorize video games is to be attentive to genre, platform (the hardware system), mode (e.g. movement and decisions, avatar creation, single-player versus multi-player), and milieu (visual game classification).[4]

The Bioshock video game series is a good example of a set of games that span two genres—action and role playing. The original game *Bioshock* came out in 2007 and was designed by Ken Levine.[5] This game spawned two more

sequels: *Bioshock 2* in 2010 and *Bioshock Infinite* in 2013.[6] This essay concentrates on the original game in the series. Not only did *Bioshock* win multiple awards, including the 2007 Game Critics Game of the Year, but it was also critically acclaimed by a host of other reviewers. *The Boston Globe* describes it as "a beautiful, brutal, and disquieting computer game … one of the best in years."[7] *The Los Angeles Times* review states: "Sure, it's fun to play, looks spectacular and is easy to control. But it also does something no other game has done to date: It really makes you feel."[8] The *New York Times* reviewer describes it as "intelligent, gorgeous, occasionally frightening" and added "*BioShock* can … hold its head high among the best games ever made."[9] *Bioshock*'s artistic dimension was of such quality that the Smithsonian selected *Bioshock* for inclusion in its "The Art of Video Games" exhibit in 2012.[10] While *Bioshock* (2007) originally came out on the Microsoft Xbox 360 platform, the game was later released on other platforms as well, such as Sony PlayStation 3. So why did *Bioshock* get such acclaim and widespread use, and what is its relationship to the Bible and women?

In analyzing video games one has to realize that games have several "layers." First there is the game story, a game's "narrative." An analysis of this level of the game might well employ aspects of a literary analysis, but game stories are different from those on the page. If games have "narratives," they are presented in a visual/audio/technical mode. The same media and music analysis one uses on films can be useful. Indeed, game scholars have often discussed the merits of narratological versus ludological approaches to game studies.[11] But once again, video games are more than visual/audio enhanced stories or digital masterpieces: they are an *interactive experience.*[12] As one analyst remarks: "Games are both object and process; they can't be read as texts, or listened to as music, they must be played."[13] The gamer interacts with the game in ways that both challenge the story and present the gamer with choices, sometimes even *moral* choices.

In addition to the analytical complexities, it is not unusual for video game writers to use cultural and intertextual references in their games, thus opening the game to the possibility for an intertextual analysis. It is no secret that the developers of *Bioshock* crafted their storyline on the basis of Ayn Rand's novel, *Atlas Shrugged* (1959). Indeed, the name of one of the characters in the story, Andrew Ryan, is an artful pun on the name Ayn Rand. Many scholars suggest that the game is a critique of her objectivist philosophy.[14] Often video game worlds also give concrete expression to powerful mythic themes. An intertextual analysis of *Bioshock*'s themes reveals that many of them refer to or resonate with

the Bible, especially Genesis 2–3.

THE BIBLE AND *BIOSHOCK*: THE GAME STORY

If *Bioshock* were a book, it would be classified as Science Fiction in the form of a dystopian alternative history. Its core story involves the underwater city of Rapture. Rapture was built by a wealthy businessman, Andrew Ryan, in 1946, and was designed as a capitalist utopia where the elite could go to get away from the despair of the post–World War II world. At the beginning of the game a film projector displays a series of slides onto a screen and the voice of Andrew Ryan proclaims:

> I am Andrew Ryan and I am here to ask you a question: Is a man not entitled to the sweat of his brow? "No," says the man in Washington, "it belongs to the poor." "No," says the man in the Vatican, "it belongs to God." "No," says the man in Moscow, "It belongs to everyone." I rejected those answers. Instead, I chose something different. I chose the impossible. I chose … Rapture.[15]

Thus, according to Ryan, Rapture "was a city where the artist would not fear the censor, where the scientist would not be bound by petty morality. Where the great would not be constrained by the small!"[16] For Ryan, rational self-interest is the central value whereas the root of all wickedness is altruism.

Although Rapture was built in 1946, the gamer does not enter it until fourteen years later, in 1960. The game begins with a plane crash in the Atlantic but you, the gamer, are able to make your way to a small island with a lighthouse. The lighthouse has a portal that allows you to enter a bathysphere and make your way down to the underwater city of Rapture. Notice I said that "you" are able to make your way down because, unlike the fictive world of novels and films, video games are *interactive fiction*. You (the gamer) affect the storyline. As interactive fiction, *Bioshock* falls in the first-person shooter/role-playing categories. Why do you have to shoot things? As you enter Rapture it is very clear that something has gone terribly wrong. What was intended to be utopia has turned into a leaking, nightmarish dystopia. As you enter the city, the ruins of shops flank your path. Debris is everywhere. Not only do you have to fight the encroaching waters of the Atlantic Ocean as you make your way through leaking corridors, but you also have to fight Rapture's crazed inhabitants.

What happened to Andrew Ryan's dream? Your ultimate goal as a player/character is to get out of Rapture, but to succeed you have to discover something about *Bioshock*'s game world. As you go into Rapture, you encounter

various posters and blood-stained graffiti as well as voice recorders left by the city's former inhabitants. These items, along with scripted sequences from a few other characters, gradually unfold the city's history. Ryan Industries discovered and marketed something called "plasmids." Plasmids allow a person to evolve by genetically enhancing their DNA. Through this bio-augmentation you can acquire cosmetic changes as well as powers such as telekinesis or the ability to shoot fire, ice, or electricity from your fingertips. All of this is made possible through genetic manipulation. What temptation! Who *wouldn't* want to become more than what they are? The result, predictably, was catastrophic. Not only did the plasmids grant powers but they resulted in addiction, physical deformity, and mental instability. That which people thought would give them god-like powers turned them instead into monsters the game refers to as "splicers." They are violent characters who are physically and mentally scarred. You have to kill them before they kill you.

What does any of this have to do with the Bible, especially Genesis 2–3? For a utopia that was supposed to be free of religious influence there are numerous religious symbols in the game's background. Aside from the city's name ("Rapture") and background religious music ("Jesus Loves Me"), there are smugglers. When the gamer enters *Smugglers Hangout*, for instance, the gamer encounters a crucified smuggler with a scattering of Bibles and crucifixes on the floor. In *Bioshock*, an active underground market for Bibles and other religious materials exist that smugglers bring into Rapture from the outside world. While some of these examples and references might be considered rather gratuitous hollow intertexts, other features of the game clearly evoke a story much older than *Atlas Shrugged*. Utopias turned into dystopias are a frequent theme in video games. It is thus unsurprising that Genesis 2–3 becomes a useful intertext in the game. In one of the recordings left by a worker involved in the construction of Rapture, the worker discloses that he warned Ryan:

> If things weren't bad enough, it seems that even our water system's sprung a leak. Yep, that's right. The irrigation system in Arcadia is taking on sea water. I told Mr. Ryan when we were building this place; either you build her like a bathtub, or she's gonna turn into a sewer. "No, McDonagh," he said, "we're not gonna build no bathtub … we're gonna build Eden."[17]

Ryan sees in his underwater city a symbolic echo of the iconic perfection of Genesis 2. Yet just as the first humans did not linger long in Eden, so Rapture falls soon into a dystopian nightmare. Unlike Adam and Eve who leave "paradise" at the end of Genesis 3, Rapture's inhabitants have to live in the crumbling leaking remains of their ruined utopia.

This allusion to Genesis 2–3 is not the only meaningful intertextuality in the

game. There are also the substances ADAM and EVE. The plasmids that are the key to genetic manipulation in Rapture require these two substances to activate them. You cannot get a plasmid without a substance called ADAM. Is ADAM powerful? The audio diary of Dr. Julia Langford declares that: "ADAM, ADAM, ADAM. … It's bathtub gin, times the atom bomb, times Eve with the serpent."[18] But ADAM is useless without another substance to fuel it: EVE. While you can get EVE in different ways, you have to inject it with a hypodermic needle (with an outline of an apple) so you can use the ADAM you have acquired.

Thus far in *Bioshock*'s game story, you have Ryan who fancies himself as a creator of his own "paradise" and even likens his goal to building Eden. You have this paradise's inhabitants who succumb to the temptation to be more than what they are. They evolve, getting superhuman, god-like powers. And it is ADAM and EVE that makes this "evolution" possible. But where does that leave you, the player? After all, these references are so much ancient history. Similar to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 who choose to eat what was forbidden, the inhabitants of Rapture choose to use ADAM and EVE. Arriving in Rapture after all of these events have transpired, you, the gamer, have a choice too, albeit not the same as the inhabitants of Rapture. You need the powers granted by the plasmids, not because you strive for the perfection of evolution, but because you will need their power to survive if you ever hope to get out of Rapture. Your choice however, revolves around how you are going to get your ADAM.

It is Dr. Brigid Tenenbaum who first discovers that a sea slug has certain rejuvenative properties. Tenenbaum is a Jewish holocaust survivor who as a child was in a concentration camp where her brilliance was recognized by the German scientists. As such, she represents a morally ambiguous geneticist who worked for Nazi Germany and later discovered ADAM. She develops ADAM and devises how to ensure a steady supply. She genetically alters the bodies of little orphaned girls of 5–8 years so that their bodies become reprocessing facilities of the used ADAM they collect from the splicer corpses that litter Rapture. The girls are called "Little Sisters." The girls are protected by "Big Daddies" whom the player has to eliminate to reach the girls. Yet the death of the Big Daddies are not really the source of your moral quandary. Your dilemma involves the Little Sisters themselves. You can harvest all the ADAM they contain, but you will have to kill them. Alternatively, you can heal them, restore their humanity and turn them into smiling little girls who will thank you. Yet if you choose the latter option, you will get a much smaller amount of ADAM. Are you going to choose the path that gives you the maximum benefit? Or will you choose the path of the minimum? One of the narrative voices that guides you

through the game tries to influence your decision:

> You think that's a child down there? Don't be fooled. She's a Little Sister now. Somebody went and turned a sweet baby girl into a monster. Whatever you thought about right and wrong on the surface, well that don't count for much down in Rapture. Those Little Sisters, they carry ADAM; the genetic material that keeps the wheel of Rapture turning. Everybody wants it. Everybody needs it.[19]

All gamers have to make choices when they play video games. But frequently, these are operational choices about what route to take or what weapon to use. More often than not, gamers are confronted with characters like zombies, monsters, or aliens that might be considered negligible from a moral standpoint; they are game-play fodder. *Bioshock*'s Splicer characters are a good example of this.[20] The choice presented by the Little Sisters, however, are different, not as an operational choice but a moral one.

When gamers enter the fictional world of video games they do so in the guise of a character called an avatar. Accordingly, they do not only have to discover the game's narrative, but they also must discover their own nature.[21] In this way, video games are different from other types of gaming. Scott Paeth, a Christian ethicist who is also a gamer, observes:

> The sense of identification between player and character is where moral possibilities—and the risks—of gaming lie. … As Christian ethicist, I enter the moral worlds of video games with some resources for reflection. Part of my distaste with playing evil comes from my sense that acting callously in the fictional setting of the game world might transfer over to my real world persona.[22]

For *Bioshock*, the issue of the moral agency is often seen as central. In 2009, the University of Washington offered a course on *Bioshock* as part of their Critical Gaming Project. The course was entitled "CHID 496F Bioshock: Cyborg Morality & Posthuman Choice." The course description states: "Bioshock affords … an excellent opportunity to investigate … moral, political, and cultural issues."[23] The course focused on body modification and posthumanism, But, in my view, the moral issue presented by the Little Sisters is still different.

In Genesis 2, God confronts the first human with one prohibition, not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. The presence of this prohibition guarantees that Adam and Eve have a choice; they can either obey or disobey. The presence of this choice establishes free will or moral agency. As a gamer, you too have free will (or the illusion of free will) in regard to the Little Sisters. You can kill them or you can save them. It is only a game and the Little Sisters are not real. In an earlier version of the game, *Bioshock*'s developers created the Little Sister

character as a bug. But they changed this image because they thought gamers could not relate to a bug. They did not think gamers could really *feel* anything for an insect, and they wanted gamers to *feel* something.[24]

How did gamers respond to the moral choice presented by the little girls? A recent study that investigated how players handle moral concerns in violent video games discovered that the desire for winning enables players to temporarily place their morals on hold.[25] Yet not all of those playing *Bioshock*, are able to do so. For instance, Grant Tavinor, a lecturer in philosophy at Lincoln University reports:

> When confronted by the choice, I couldn't bring myself to harvest the Little Sister; in fact, the prospect of doing so made me feel queasy. And so, I saved her an action that was accompanied by a sudden swelling of the accompanying music and my own emotions. This response is not peculiar to me—I'm not an overly sensitive gamer—as almost everyone I have spoken to about the game has acknowledged a similar emotional reaction.[26]

Similarly, in an interview, *Bioshock*'s own Ken Levine responded to a question if he "harvested" the Little Sisters by stating:

> Honestly, I—can't. [Laughs]. … I had a journalist talk to me yesterday who said his fiancé saw him harvest a Little Sister and now he's sleeping on the couch. … I know there are people who do, but they have to live with that choice.[27]

As one of *Bioshock*'s characters, Andrew Ryan, notes: "We all make choices, but in the end, our choices make us."[28] Ryan's words are an important reminder that when gamers play video games such as *Bioshock*, there may be consequences beyond entertainment.

Gender, Women, and *Bioshock*

Bioshock has a number of issues related to gender best analyzed in the following four questions. First, what is the relationship betwee the gender of the player and the gender of the character they represent in the game world? Second, how are female characters visualized? Third, what types of female characters inhabit the game world? Fourth, how does the substance EVE relate to its biblical counterpart Eve?

On the Relationship of Avatars and Gender

Gamers enter the video game world through an avatar or character. The more closely players identify with their avatars in virtual reality, the more likely arises the possibility of real world consequences. While this identification is frequently discussed concerning first-person shooter games and the violence they involve, avatars also create gender conflicts. Although some games allow the gamer to choose the gender of the avatar, many avatars are male. One might deduce that this gender bias is intended to coincide with the gender of the gamer because most gamers are assumed to be male.[29] In the 1980s and early 1990s, this assumption was perhaps correct, but female gamers are no longer a minority.

When games have female avatars, their bodies are often visualized in an over-sexualized manner. This oversexualization coincides with the depiction of female video-game characters in general.[30] Since video games are interactive fiction, the inclusion or exclusion of female avatars makes a difference for women gamers. For instance, Jesse Fox and others warn of the possible consequences of women and girls encountering and accepting sexualized female avatars as their game representatives. They explain:

> Going forward, it is clear that further research is needed to determine the short- and long-term effects of sexualized representations as well as what may mitigate negative effects. With video games and online virtual environments becoming an increasingly popular pastime, and women continuing to be portrayed as interactive sex objects within them, we need a greater understanding of these experiences before we subject women and girls to objectifying and detrimental imagery in another, and possibly more powerful, medium. Our studies take an important step in this direction by demonstrating that women who spend time in virtual environments and playing video games featuring sexualized characters may subsequently self-objectify, and that this self-objectification may in turn lead to generalized negative attitudes toward women in the form of endorsing rape myths. As we continue to seek explanations for the perpetuation of RMA and rape culture in society, it is important that we examine the messages transmitted through various media.[31]

Importantly, few studies investigate the long-term impact of sexualized representations for female gamers. Fox and her co-authors consider such game depictions as part of rape culture, a strong statement indeed. Yet there are also some indications that sexualized presentations of female avatars have begun to change. Media researcher Teresa Lynch collected data on 571 playable female characters in various video games from 1989 to 2014. She observes that a change has occurred in the last ten years, stating: “We attribute this decline to an increasing female interest in gaming coupled with the heightened criticism levied at the industry’s male hegemony.”[32] An interesting example is the female

avatar/protagonist Lara Croft in *Tomb Raider* whose image changes from a busty, scantily clad, sexualized character to a more normal body type in pants and a tank top. Lynch, however, emphasizes that oversexualized depictions persist among most secondary female characters.[33]

Yet in *Bioshock*, gamers cannot choose a female avatar, and so female gamers who play *Bioshock* must use a male avatar named Jack. You never "see" how Jack looks. Only during the game do gamers begin to realize Jack's real identity and his importance to the other characters. In short, this male avatar's physical appearance (unlike many female avatars' bodies in other video games) never seems to be important. The same cannot be said of the non-avatar female characters in *Bioshock*.

On the Visualization of Female Characters and the Beauty Ideal

Throughout history, societal expectations of female beauty have plagued women's self-esteem. One interesting aspect of the decadence of Rapture in *Bioshock* pertains to the issue of physical attributes, especially those of women. For instance, graffiti on the floor of the Medical Pavilion reads: "Aesthetics are a moral imperative."[34] Other visual artifacts offer similar messages. A poster features a beautiful woman with the reminder: "Remember you can never be too perfect." Another poster proudly promises: "With ADAM there is no reason not to be beautiful." This statement is rather ironic because increased use of ADAM leads to physical deformities. However, the use of ADAM is not the only problem when it comes to beauty; there is also Dr. J. S. Steinman.

While a popular adage states that "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" the idea takes on a new dimension in *Bioshock*. Dr. Steinman's office is located in the game's second level, called the "Medical Pavilion." He is a plastic surgeon involved in "cosmetic enhancement," as advertised on the posters. Yet he is more than a surgeon, as he also considers himself an artist:

> ADAM presents new problems for the professional. As your tools improve, so do your standards. There was a time, I was happy enough to take off a wart or two, or turn a real circus freak into something you can show in the daylight. But that was then, when we took what we got, but with ADAM … the flesh becomes clay. What excuse do we have not to sculpt, and sculpt, and sculpt, until the job is done?[35]

As Steinman becomes more and more crazed in his ADAM usage, his view on "beauty" changes. He likens himself to a contemporary Picasso:

> When Picasso became bored of painting people, he started representing them as cubes and other abstract forms. The world called him a genius! I've spent my entire surgical career creating the same tired shapes, over and over again: the upturned nose, the cleft chin, the ample bosom. Wouldn't it be wonderful if I could do with a knife what that old Spaniard did with a brush?[36]

The manifestation of his quest for female perfection can be found in the results of his "artistry." Proof of his "artwork" appears on the disfigured posters hanging on the walls of Rapture and the disfigured bodies scattered on the floors. Horribly mutilated faces and bodies reflect Steinman's quest to produce the perfection of beauty. Especially significant is the fact that it is only visages of *women* that appear on the posters, and we hear only from women who were operated on by Steinman as he practiced his "art." Thus once again, the game emphasizes cultural expectations of *female* physical appearance.

On the Female Characters in the Game World

While the powerful figures in *Bioshock* are males, two types of female characters symbolize most prominently the assumptions of gender in *Bioshock.* The first are the female scientists. *Bioshock*'s depiction of female scientists such as Dr. Julie Langford and Dr. Brigid Tenenbaum is important for two reasons. In contrast to the oversexualized female avatars and secondary characters that often populate video games, Langford and Tenenbaum are noted for their intellect. This thirst for knowledge and work as scientists is certainly unusual for female characters of the games in the 1940s and 1950s. Yet this commendable shift from a highly sexualized portrayal of women to women as scholars also has a downside. When these female scholars search for knowledge, their actions have disastrous consequences. The negative depiction is particularly virulent for the character of the geneticist, Brigid Tenenbaum. For instance, she explains in one of the audio diaries:

> I saw one of the smugglers having a game of catching on the docks today. And this surprised me, because his hands were crippled during the war. He was unloading the barge the other day when he was bitten from this sea slug. He woke up the next morning and he found he could move his fingers for the first time in years. I asked him if he still had that sea slug. As luck would have it, he did.[37]

Another example appears later in the game. There, gamers realize that Tenenbaum is instrumental in the discovery of ADAM. Moreover, she helps develop the ADAM "factories" that become the "Little Sisters." Tenenbaum explains in an audio diary:

> The children must remain functional be to effective producers of ADAM. I had hoped we could place them into vegetative state so they would be more pliable. I find being around them very uncomfortable. Even with those things implanted in their bellies, they are still children. They play and sing. Sometimes they look at me, and they don't stop. Sometimes they smile.[38]

Yet eventually, Tenenbaum shows remorse over the "ADAM factories" that she helps create. She explains:

> One of the children came and sat in my lap. I push her off, I shout, "Get away from me!" I can see the Adam oozing out of the corner of her mouth, thick and green. Her filthy hair hanging in her face, dirty clothes, and that dead glow in her eye. … I feel … hatred, like I never felt before, in my chest. Bitter, burning, fury. I can barely breathe. And suddenly, I know, it is not this child I hate.[39]

Ultimately the little girls awaken Tenenbaum's maternal feelings, and so she views the girls as her daughters. She even tries everything to free them and make them "normal" again. In a way, her eventual concern for the "Little Sisters" becomes a step towards her becoming a more moral character in the game.

Tenenbaum's characterization has evoked comments on multiple blogging sites. Some bloggers see her dedication to knowledge as a pro-feminist image while others focus on the disastrous results that come as a consequence of her "seeking knowledge." Those who hold this latter position regard her shift to "maternal" feelings as an anti-feminist glorification of women's traditional role as mother. Yet, neither position is correct because for contemporary feminists the role of a professional woman and the role of a mother are not an "either/or" proposition. One reviewer notes that female characters such as Tenenbaum integrate emotion and reason and thus are the only sane characters in the game.[40]

The second type of female characters are the "Little Sisters." They are intriguing because gamers encounter them as infantile and vulnerable as well as requiring the protection given by the "Big Daddies." Thus, they are often seen to reinforce patriarchal values as they are small, weak, and naïve. They call the Big Daddies "Mr. Bubbles," and they call "angels" the corpses from which they collect the ADAM. The Little Sisters are the proverbial damsels in distress who need to be rescued by the big, powerful, and paternal males. Near the end of the game, Tenenbaum reflects: "I know why it has to be children, but why just girls? This I cannot determine why, but I know it is so."[41]

But the Little Sisters are also central to getting what gives people power in the game, namely ADAM. Does their central role give them a positive characterization or does it merely reinforce their image as "helpless human commodities"?[42] It remains unclear throughout the game. Still, the Little Sisters are significant for another reason. Game reviewers describe them as "the moral center of *Bioshock*."[43] First-time players, who have not read any spoilers, understand only at the end of the game that there are several possible endings. They are determined by the gamer's actions toward the Little Sisters. If a gamer chooses to harvest the Little Sisters so that the gamer gets the maximum amount of ADAM, the sickness that a gamer sees in Rapture destroys the world outside Rapture. If the gamer saves a few of the Little Sisters, the result is a little bit better. However, if the gamer refuses to harvest any of the Little Sisters and instead helps them, the game ends differently. The gamer and the Little Sisters escape, the outside world is saved, and the Little Sisters tell the gamer that they love the gamer and that they are all "family." When players receive this ending, some report to have tears in their eyes!

On the Substance, EVE, and the Biblical Eve

In *Bioshock* the story features an Eden-like city turned dystopia. There is temptation. There is choice. There is a substance ADAM. But what about the substance EVE? Unlike the biblical account of Adam and Eve, the gamer encounters EVE before they encounter ADAM. Moreover, the substance EVE is not derived from ADAM although it is absolutely essential to the game. For instance, in the reception history of Genesis 2–3, the biblical Eve is frequently linked to both sexuality and knowledge. This link is usually related to the various interpretations of the Hebrew verb, "to know," referring to both physical and intellectual knowledge. Unsurprisingly, both of these notions about knowledge also appear in Eve's characterization in *Bioshock*.

The effort to link Eve with sexual knowledge is apparent in the sexualized objectification of Eve in the location named "Eve's Garden XXX." Located on the game's seventh level, "Eve's Garden XXX" is an erotic dancing venue found in Fort Frolic. An advertisement for the club in *Bioshock* features a half-naked Mermaid holding out a large, tantalizing fruit with an invitation emblazoned on its skin: "Come Bite the Apple!"[44] *Bioshock* also objectifies Eve in nonsexual ways. A reference to the biblical garden of Eden is found in *Bioshock*'s

"Gatherer's Garden," a vending machine found on each of *Bioshock*'s levels. Gamers can purchase plasmids with red fluid in an apple shaped container with the ADAM that they have acquired from the Little Sisters. The gamer buys EVE in vending machines and other venues.

Bioshock's female scientists, such as Tenenbaum, echo the biblical Eve, as their quest for knowledge has disastrous consequences. Although the substance EVE is instrumental in the genetic mutation that causes the downfall of Rapture, it is also central to leaving Rapture. Without EVE a gamer will not survive. In this way, *Bioshock*'s EVE is similar to its biblical counterpart. Yet the first biblical woman eats from the tree in the early part of Genesis 3 and receives her name only at the end of the chapter. She is Eve, "life," and without her, there would be no offspring in Genesis 4. Moreover, the life she creates is only possible through the partnership with the first male. In *Bioshock*, ADAM and EVE are useless by themselves but they work with each other. Despite EVE's importance, it is odd that the game focuses more on ADAM than on EVE. One blogger notes:

> I get why Adam is necessary, it rewrites your genetic code to let you use plasmids. And that's neat. But I figure, once they get the Adam they need for the plasmid, why aren't they obsessed with getting Eve so they can use their plasmids whenever they want? … I feel like if I was a splicer I'd be obsessed with Eve.[45]

Bible, Gender, and Gaming: A Conclusion

When Ken Levine explains the influences behind his creation of *Bioshock* he usually mentions Ayn Rand but not Genesis 2–3. Nevertheless, the cultural power of an intertext is that it resonates with its past use and cannot be forgotten or erased.[46] By employing the symbols of Eden, namely Adam and Eve, the game evokes the memory of the biblical story whose themes have been told and retold in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim writings throughout the centuries. As a story ubiquitous in Western popular culture, its symbols often function as cultural artifacts. As such, these symbols inform the social construction of gender in both positive and negative ways. *Bioshock* is a good example of such usage. On the one hand, the substance EVE is life and essential to the safety of the gamer. On the other hand, "Eve's Garden XXX" is an exotic dancing venue that objectifies women as sexual objects. While cultural artifacts take inspiration from the biblical text, they owe no alliance to the religious meanings of such symbols and often recycle the story for their own use.

Yet *Bioshock* does more than allude to ancient themes. It is *interactive* fiction. When players enter Rapture/Eden they must make their own choices. These choices affect their gaming experience and, as some scholars suggest, affect and reflect their decision-making reasoning outside of gaming. This situation is particularly significant when it comes to gender stereotypes and perception. How will gamers react to the objectification of *Bioshock*'s secondary female characters? Will the sexualization of these characters reinforce gender prejudice? Or will the possibilities presented by the game's female scientists, with their balance of reason and emotion, be inspiring? Will a gamer's actions in the virtual world of *Bioshock* have any consequences for gendered relations in the real world in which the gamer lives? The answers to these questions are crucial because the words of the digital character Andrew Ryan are more important than gamers realize: "We all make choices, but in the end, our choices make us." In the end, gamers are not as independent as they want to believe they are, unconsciously reinforcing ancient stereotypes over and over again. We also need to ask what choices about gender gaming corporations will make in the future. Will they have more avatar selections for gamers? Will they recognize that all gamers do not fit into the traditional stereotype of the "male" gamer? And what can women's voices contribute to the development of the gaming genre?

Although feminist biblical scholars are trained in analyzing the world within the text (narrative criticism), the world behind the text (historical reconstruction and the history of the text's composition), and the world in front of the text (reception criticism), they are not always conversant with the role that popular culture plays in a text's interpretation. Yet as cultural artifacts, biblical texts appear in numerous ways in popular culture with implications for and assumptions about gender. For this reason, feminist biblical scholars need to pay attention to this type of appropriation. Several years ago, a colleague and I examined the effects of popular culture's appropriations on the imagination of what it means to be a man and a woman. We did not directly address video games, but one of our comments reminds feminist scholars that even video games bear witness to the influence of biblical texts and their longevity. We stated: "While encountering the Bible in popular culture may be 'fun,' it also carries implications for the construction of gender. Adam and Eve as the first man and woman in the story world of Eden still inspire us to call on them, whether for a joke or to sell a product. As long as that remains true, the path back to the Garden will beckon us to follow."[47]

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CHAPTER 18

GAMING WITH RAHAB AND THE SPIES

CHARLES M. RIX

As a professor of undergraduates, I contend with the powerful hold games have over my students' available brain-space. *Bioshock*, the new *Legend of Zelda*, and the ever-popular cooperative role-playing game *Dungeons and Dragons* capture their attention more readily than a lecture on the dialogic nature of wisdom literature in the Hebrew Bible. When I ask why these games absorb their energy, students enthusiastically launch into detailed descriptions of storylines, strategies, and camaraderie. They speak of being in the zone, an addictive-like gaming state where hours fly like seconds.[1] Race, class, and gender distinctions that hold decisive sway in other campus contexts suddenly evaporate in the haze of communal game-playing satisfaction. In short, the attraction to games is rooted in the basic human need to play: the carnivalesque social phenomenon of bonding to explore alternate realities in a space outside social norms, taboos, and hierarchies.[2]

Not everyone derives such satisfaction from playing games. I confess to being stressed out by the breakneck speed required to compete successfully in most video games. But gaming is not limited to competitive male-oriented digital offerings. All of us play games in a variety of social contexts.[3] Fundamentally, games exist wherever people interact in a decision-making process. The analysis of how we play these games, termed game theory or interactive decision theory, is itself a type of game that presupposes that its players, or gamers, are rational beings who make decisions to maximize their own interests or payoffs. In addition, game theory holds that, as evolutionary

creatures, rational players may make choices to increase their chances for getting what they want even if these choices seem otherwise *irrational* or counter to what is expected behavior in their context. To analyze and predict the choices gamers make, game theorists draw from a variety of techniques ranging from complex mathematics to tools, such as a payoff matrix, that diagram gamer's choices. Ultimately, game theory as an analytical tool *is* play: the creative use of various tools to analyze a player's decision-making.[4]

Reading a biblical story as a game turns the narrative into a literary playing field on which readers interact with its characters as gamers. Gaming with the characters immerses us in play as we imagine various options available to the characters even as they themselves are at play in the story. The rationality of the players derives from the details in the narrative, the direct speech by the players, or the rhetorical strategies in their story worlds. Readers play along with the characters by weighing their options against the efficacy of their actions to assess the rationality or irrationality of the player's decisions and the quality of their payoffs. Based on the outcome of the game, readers may be able to predict the future behaviors of a story's characters in similar situations.

Particularly for feminist biblical critics, game theory holds appeal through its capacity to destabilize power dynamics between characters expressed purely in gender, social, or national binaries. Game theory shifts attention onto the merits of a player's interactive decision-making skills and their respective payoffs. Gaming further blurs, interrupts, and subverts identity distinctions between players as we observe them and interact socially in the upside-down carnivalesque world of play. Players may imitate others, reverse roles, mask their intentions, trick, compete with, or even cooperate with other players to achieve their payoffs. All strategies remain in the service of game playing. These strategies need not have any direct relationship to roles the players perform outside the gaming context. Game theory opens the world of social interactions between players, and provides insight into the story that may be less evident with other methodologies.

This insight is also evident when the Bible is read through game theory. The story of Rahab and the spies in Joshua 2 plays particularly well as a game. The story presents a conquest involving rival tribes, their territories, and their characters: an Israelite military leader (Joshua) and his cadre of spies on the one hand and a Canaanite king, a stealthy prostitute (Rahab), and mysterious informants on the other. Rahab and the spies are the main players seeking maximum payoffs as they ponder an impending Israelite invasion. Beyond a traditional reading of Rahab as a clever Canaanite prostitute,[5] Rahab and the

spies are gaming equals whose national, gender, and social identities are not rungs on a ladder of dominance but roles and positions through which they interact to play a precarious game of survival.[6] How will they roll the dice to negotiate their interaction? Will they make decisions to save their own skin or cooperate with each other?

This essay analyzes the game between Rahab and the spies, based on a familiar situation in game theory known as "The Prisoner's Dilemma."[7] The Prisoner's Dilemma provides a means for analyzing the choices Rahab and spies make as they play their game of survival. Reading Joshua 2 through the Prisoner's Dilemma exposes the rationality of the Israelite conquest rhetoric, heralded in Joshua 1, and the rhetorical "othering" of Canaanites elsewhere in the Torah as suboptimal gaming strategies for obtaining the maximum payoff of survival and coexistence. By contrast, mutual cooperation emerges as a surprisingly irrational strategy that results in a better long-term outcome for both the spies and Rahab. Thus, the reading of Joshua 2 as a game transports readers into an alternate world of play that counters the predictable outcomes of the conquest narrative and instead proposes mutual cooperation as an ideal strategy for coexisting with one's neighbors.

The examination of the story of Rahab and the spies as a game proceeds in four sections. The first section outlines the concept of the Prisoner's Dilemma game. The second section plays a version of the Prisoner's Dilemma game with Rahab and maps their choices with a payoff matrix. The third section discusses what readers gain by studying this narrative through game theory. Finally, the fourth section suggests other biblical stories that may benefit from the application of this theory.

The Prisoner's Dilemma Game

The Prisoner's Dilemma proposes a situation in which game players, pitted against each other, are most likely to make choices that do not lead to the optimal result for either player.[8] The game highlights that players could have achieved the maximum payoff if they had communicated and cooperated with each other. While the game may be adapted to different situations, the following story illustrates the game's basic concept. A king wants to convict two prisoners A and B. He suspects they are plotting to commit the crime of sedition, but requires a confession. However, the king already has enough evidence to convict

both of a less serious crime. Therefore, he offers a deal to each prisoner without allowing them to communicate with each other: turn in your friend and receive a lighter sentence. The deal presents the following potential outcomes: (1) none of them confesses, and so both get two years in prison on the conviction of a lesser crime; (2) one of them confesses and goes free, but the other gets ten years in prison; (3) both confess, and so each gets a reduced sentence of eight years in prison. Since neither prisoner knows what the other will do, we may assume that each will act in his or her best interest and confess. However, the optimal outcome requires that they find a way to collaborate and agree not to confess.

Readers may use the gaming model of the Prisoner's Dilemma to analyze the player's choices using the tools of a payoff matrix, Nash equilibrium, dominant strategy, and focal point.

Payoff matrix

The payoff matrix assigns values to the possible choices, A and B. For illustration purposes, a numeric value, or util, is assigned to evaluate the payoff of A and B's decisions. The util of +1 represents the benefit of a decision that results in one less year spent in prison vis-a-vis the sentence of ten years for the more serious crime of sedition.

	A Confess	A Deny
B Confess	+2 +2	0 +10
B Deny	+10 0	+8 +8

In the example, the payoff matrix summarizes four potential outcomes. If both confess, each gains two years of freedom (left-upper quadrant). If A confesses but B denies, A gains ten years of freedom while B gains nothing (left-lower quadrant). Likewise, if B confesses but A denies, B gains ten years of freedom while A gains nothing (right-upper quadrant). If both deny, each gains eight years freedom (right-lower quadrant). Clearly, denial through the mutual cooperation of A and B offers the greatest opportunity for freedom. Yet, as

neither of them knows what the other will choose, each will likely act in his or her own best interest and confess unless they find a way to cooperate and agree to deny the plot of sedition.

Nash equilibrium

The Nash equilibrium describes the condition on which both players rationally strategize the best possible response to what they expect the other player will do without colluding with each other (left-upper quadrant).[9] Yet, if Nash equilibrium occurs, the least amount of prison time for A and B is not achieved (cf. right-lower quadrant). The Nash equilibrium posits most players will rationally choose what is in their best interest, not necessarily what they could achieve if they cooperated.

Dominant Strategy

In the Prisoner's Dilemma, the dominant strategy depicts the best outcome for each player when evaluating in advance what the other player will do (often resulting in the Nash equilibrium). When one assumes that players do not trust each other or do not talk with each other, the payoff matrix shows that if A knows in advance that B will confess, then it is in A's best interest to also confess. Yet if A knows in advance that B will deny, then it is still in A's interest to confess. A does not necessarily need to know what B will do, confess, or deny, to determine that A should confess to get the better outcome either way. The strategy of confessing is A's dominant strategy.

Focal Point

The focal point, or Schelling point, is the strategic moment when a player's decision maintains the dominant strategy.[10] Focal points are not rationally calculated through mathematics. Rather, they are assessed based on psychological factors that are often considered impossible to measure but normally yield the best outcomes.[11] In the example of the Prisoner's Dilemma,

the focal point is A's assessment of the right time or manner to confess so that A's confession coincides with either B's confession or B's denial. If A and B cooperate to remain silent so that both receive the least time in prison, the focal point is the moment when A and B agree to strike a deal or when or where A and B strategize to both deny complicity in the plot of sedition.

Thus, the Prisoner's Dilemma and related tools provide scaffolding with which to articulate and evaluate the decisions that two players seek the optimal payoff. Players may also make the best strategic responses to anticipate the actions of the other, resulting in the Nash equilibrium. However, the decision may not result in the best payoff for both players. The risk of mutual cooperation, which theoretically is the least likely option players choose, may result in the maximum payoff for both players.

Reading Rahab's Story as a Prisoner's Dilemma

In Joshua 2, Rahab and two Israelite spies play a game similar to that suggested by the Prisoner's Dilemma. People of the city inform the king that Israelites entered the city to search out the land (Josh. 2:2–3). The king orders Rahab to expose the Israelite men as spies. We are not told how the king knows the spies are associated with Rahab, but perhaps he suspects collusion between them for some larger nefarious plot. Rahab and the spies are now faced with a situation similar to the Prisoner's Dilemma. If Rahab exposes the spies, she saves her life in the present moment but loses an opportunity to negotiate with the spies for her family's survival in God's impending ban on the city. If the spies betray Rahab's hospitality to avoid capture by the king, they may escape and save their lives. In so doing, they forgo bargaining with Rahab for their survival or other purposes for which they desire connections with her. The logic of the Prisoner's Dilemma requires that the impending capture by the king dictates to both Rahab and the spies that they betray each other and save themselves. In light of the hostilities between the Israelites and Canaanites in Joshua 1, it is unlikely that Rahab and the spies trust each other or cooperate with each other. Thus the game's question is: will both players do what is predictable and act in their own interests (Nash equilibrium) or will they risk cooperation to achieve a better payoff? The story illustrates that they choose what we least expect, namely that they cooperate.

As the story continues, Rahab does not expose the spies but hides them on the

roof of her house. When the king asks her to bring the men out, she admits they entered her house, but she also deceives the king by telling him the Israelites already left the city. She disavows knowing the men's Israelite identity and she encourages the king to capture them (Josh. 2:4–7). Then Rahab goes to the roof where the men are lying down for the night. She seizes the moment to make a deal with them. Protecting the spies from discovery, and possible execution, she asks them to return the favor by protecting her, her father, mother, brothers, and sisters, and "all who belong to them from God's invasion of the city" (Josh. 2:8–13). The spies agree to cooperate on the condition that Rahab does not reveal their business in Jericho (Josh. 2:14). Rahab, letting the spies down on the outside wall, instructs them to hide in the hill country for three days before going on their way (Josh. 2: 15–16). Yet, before the spies leave the city, they impose additional conditions. They instruct Rahab to tie a crimson cord in the window, to gather all her family into her house, and not to go out into the street. The family is now involved in the game of cooperation with the enemy that is contrary to their "best interest" instincts: when attacked, rush out into the streets and fight. If family members go out into the street and are killed, then their deaths are on their own heads. Yet if the family members cooperate with Rahab and are killed by other Israelites, then the spies bear the responsibility for their death. Finally, the spies repeat the conditions of cooperation. If Rahab mentions the spies to anyone, they are released from the deal. Rahab agrees and ties the cord in the window (Josh. 2:17–21). As the story concludes, the spies return to Joshua, tell him what happened, and reiterate Rahab's confession of God's power (Josh. 2:22–24; Josh. 2:8.11). At the destruction of Jericho (Josh. 6:22–27), Joshua agrees to the terms of the spies' deal with Rahab, and she and all her family are spared. As we play along with Rahab and the spies, we also use the tools of a payoff matrix, Nash equilibrium, dominant strategy, and focal point to analyze their choices.

Payoff matrix

The Payoff matrix maps the choices made by Rahab and the spies as they respond to their dilemma. In assigning utils, the value of +1 indicates survival. Death (or the likely risk thereof) is assigned –1. Thus for the survival of the two spies, survival is assessed at +2. For the survival of Rahab, her mother and father, her brothers and sisters, and every other family member, we assess a value of +10.

	Rahab betrays the spies	Rahab cooperates with the spies
Spies betray Rahab	+1 +2	+8 –2
Spies cooperate with Rahab	–8 +2	+10 +2

In this scenario, the upper left quadrant describes the results if Rahab and the spies act solely in their own interests. It is most likely that Rahab acts in her immediate best interest, exposes the spies to the king, which, in turn, saves her own life in the moment (+1). In this scenario, she recognizes that her reputation is more secure if she complies with the king's request to expose the spies. As readers, we know that saving her life in the near-term risks losing her life and that of her family in the long term. Likewise, it is in the spies' immediate interest to betray Rahab and escape to save their lives (+2). They reason that as foreigners and enemy spies, Rahab would rather betray them to save her own life.

In the lower left quadrant, Rahab decides to strike a deal with the spies but discloses the business of the spies to the king to serve her own interests. As the spies indicate in Josh. 2:20, once Rahab says anything about the deal, the spies are released from the oath they made. During the raid on Jericho, the Israelite spies survive, but Rahab's life and that of her family are no longer guaranteed. Nonetheless, even without protection from the spies we may imagine that some in her family escape God's invasion of the city. As Josh. 2:19 suggests, the spies may not be able to guarantee that the lives of Rahab's family members will be saved. Therefore, the converse must also be considered, namely that part of Rahab's family might escape. Thus, a util of –8 represents the scenario in which Rahab invalidates the oath, the spies save their own lives, and two of Rahab's family members survive the attack on the city.

For the upper right quadrant, Rahab conceals the presence of the spies and negotiates to cooperate with them, as outlined in Josh. 2:11–21, to save her life and that of her family. However, as indicated in Josh. 2:19, something goes wrong and some members of Rahab's family are killed (Josh. 2:19) by Israelite invaders. Thus, in accordance with the mutual agreement, the spies forfeit their lives for failing to protect Rahab's family members who die. Appropriating the *lex talionis* (a life for a life) as a gaming rule where one assesses the value of

life, the reduction of two saved family members corresponds to two forfeited lives of the spies.

The lower right quadrant describes the riskiest scenario. Here, Rahab and the spies negotiate a deal that is mutually acceptable on the grounds that both cooperate and swear not to violate the oath. Rahab stays silent about the spies' business and the spies guarantee the safety of Rahab's family. As signs that both parties are willing to risk trusting the other, Rahab puts out the scarlet cord as a pledge of good faith and the spies hide in the hill country for three days. All lives are saved, which is the best payoff for both the spies and Rahab.

Nash equilibrium

While the story concludes with a mutually favorable outcome (Josh. 6:22–27), the Prisoner's Dilemma highlights the irrationality of Rahab and the spies' choice to cooperate. As noted above, the principle of the Nash equilibrium suggests that in a game of war during which players seek to conquer the other, such as the Israelites and Canaanites in the world of Joshua 1, we expect players to save their own skin, betray their enemies, and assume their opponents will do the same. Cooperation with the enemy is not normally an available or viable option. However, via the payoff matrix, it is in the best interest of both players to choose the unexpected, namely cooperation.

Dominant Strategy

Moreover, the decision to cooperate coheres with the dominant strategy of both players. The dominant strategy keeps each player in control of her or his situation rather than being dominated by the other player. As seen in the payoff matrix, the better choices for the spies and Rahab involve cooperation. Rahab's highest scores are in the upper and lower right quadrants and the spies' highest scores are in the lower left and lower right quadrants. Even if Rahab does not know whether the spies remain silent or cooperative, she achieves a favorable outcome either way if she cooperates. The analysis also holds true for the spies.

Focal Point

Rahab and the spies mark Rahab's house as the focal point to execute their cooperative strategy. From the point of view of the spies, Rahab's house is on the outer side of the city wall (Josh. 2:15), perhaps the Israelite men reason that Rahab's house provides the strategic access to Jericho and a location to discretely glean information about their surroundings. Perhaps they understand that Rahab's name refers to her professional skills: a well-known person with a broad skill set to meet the needs of a diverse clientele. As knowledge of the spies gains an audience with the king, it is not difficult to imagine that Rahab serves a respectable clientele whose influence and knowledge reaches far and wide throughout Jericho's social circles. However, when the king orders Rahab to betray the spies, Rahab hides the Israelite men (Josh. 2:4) on her rooftop signaling her choice to risk an unexpected cooperative arrangement. A mutual decision by the players to execute their strategy of cooperation using Rahab's roof at the focal point indicates their shared reasoning that the odds of negotiating their situation and surviving are better when they cooperate than if they take matters into their own hands. In gaming terms, the players forgo the Nash equilibrium to risk a better payoff.

However, the focal point of the rooftop points to something more significant about the nature of the game in which Rahab and the spies are involved. The players' cooperative strategy takes place in a carnivalesque location of "play": a space where fixed identities are suspended, participants mix freely, identities are ambiguous, and hierarchies are subverted. Anxieties concerning Israelites mixing with Canaanites surface at various points within the Hebrew Bible. Levitical law asserts that Israelite association or participation in sexual coupling practices like those of the Canaanites defile the Israelite community resulting in a defiled land, God's punishment, and the land vomiting out the inhabitants (Lev. 18:24–30).[12] Similarly, the book of Proverbs features a prohibition about the sexual coupling between Israelite men and the so-called "strange or foreign women" (Proverbs 7), which reflects an underlying anxiety about the Israelite ethnic identity.[13] However, in the carnivalesque atmosphere of the rooftop, Israelite males and a Canaanite prostitute enter into a space where they mix freely with no anxiety whatsoever. The private meeting between Rahab, a prostitute, and the spies—at night, on her roof, as they "lie down" (Josh. 2:8)—suggests an opportunity for a sexual encounter. This scenario coheres with what one expects from the Levitical totalizing description of Canaanite depravity. Yet, no sexual encounter occurs in the text. Instead, an interchange happens that we

do not expect. Rahab and the spies partake in the upside-down carnival world of play. Instead of the Israelites, it is Rahab who speaks forthrightly about God's power. Similarly, the Israelite spies hide in Rahab's house to negotiate a deal with her without any expression of militaristic power or language of conquest and dominance. During this play, Rahab expresses her vulnerability giving the vulnerable Israelite men a sense of potency and power (Josh. 2:9–12), and the spies give conditions of their own. Thus, the focal point for cooperation is set within an atmosphere of carnival play. It coheres with characteristics of gamers "in the zone" where the act of cooperative play overrides anxieties about individual identities. The game is executed effectively with both Rahab and the spies achieving the optimal outcome. All of them survive.

Rahab and the Spies as Gamers: What Do We Gain?

Grounded in game theory, the interpretation focuses on Rahab and the spies who choose cooperative strategies to achieve maximum payoff. When players understand this principle embedded in the game plan, they learn that the story's cooperative decision-making strategies undercut the "othering" rhetorical strategies designed to keep the Canaanites subjugated to the Israelites. Three such strategies stand out, as the game of Joshua 2 deconstructs "othering" rhetorical strategies. The first strategy advances a heteropatriarchal bravura heralded in Joshua 1. The second strategy fosters Israelite identity politics about illicit Canaanite sexuality articulated in biblical material. Finally, a third strategy promotes the rhetoric of the Levitical laws about sexual coupling that advance Israelite disgust to justify violence against the Canaanites. However, the reading of Joshua 2 as a game undermines all three strategies.

First, the reading of Rahab and the spies as a game upends heteropatriarchal and geopolitical bravura articulated in Joshua 1. This biblical text asserts: "Be strong and courageous! God will be with Joshua as he was with Moses; God will give Israelites the land, and no one will be able to stand against the Israelites all the days of their lives." Such heteropatriarchal bravura suggests that the conquest narrative promotes seeking a Nash equilibrium according to which each side anticipates the reactions of the other based on self-interest and self-preservation. Thus, readers of Joshua 2 expect that the Israelite spies enter Jericho ready to battle with the Canaanites.

However, the action of the spies does not correspond to this expectation, as heteropatriarchal, geopolitical, and warrior-like bravura does not characterize their actions in Jericho. Rather, they enter the house of a Canaanite prostitute and play a game of survival with her. They abandon Joshua's fighting mentality in favor of the strategy of cooperation. As the payoff matrix suggests, a dominant strategy of cooperation is more advantageous than a conquest strategy. Gamers in the zone understand that Rahab and the spies are not constrained by their national identities. Their desire to achieve the optimal payout in their game, namely survival of the spies, Rahab, and her family, occurs in the carnivalized world of play that transcends national, gender, and ideological barriers that would otherwise separate them.

The challenge to the heteropatriachal and geopolitical bravura strategy also suggests a larger game that Israel as a nation must play. It is the game of coexistence with strangers in a land not their own. Rahab's story throws Israel's dilemma into relief. On the one hand, Israel is to conquer the Canaanite land (Joshua 1). On the other hand, Israel is to live peacefully with non-Israelites in the land (Joshua 2). Reading Rahab through the Prisoner's Dilemma suggests that the cooperation between the Israelites and the Canaanites provides a more optimal solution for both players than a win-lose conquest strategy rooted in tribal self-interests. Moreover, such a solution results in a payoff that aligns with ideals of the Holiness Code. It values coexistence with one's neighbors more than the principles of conquest and subjugation. The juxtaposition of these alternative visions for an Israelite-Canaanite coexistence also conforms to other biblical passages such as Josh. 1:3 or Lev. 19:34. The first strategy teaches players about the impotence of an androcentric conquest strategy and the value of peaceful cooperation. At the start of the Joshua conquest narrative the story of Rahab undercuts the efficacy of Israelite military bravura. The storyline that moves from Joshua 1 to Joshua 2 dismisses conquest and war as it favors a thoughtful strategy toward coexistence on the basis of mutual cooperation.

Second, the reading of Joshua 2 as a game subverts the hegemony of the Hebrew Bible's strategy of "othering" Canaanites based solely on their sexual practices. The prohibition of sexual coupling between Israelite men and the so-called "strange or foreign women" (Proverbs 7),[14] and biblical laws that catalog prohibited Canaanite sexual practices (Lev. 18:1–30) may be adduced. In Leviticus 18, Israel is identified as God's people by "not doing as they do in the land of Canaan" (Lev. 18:1–4), and Canaanite sexual practices have defiled the land that Israel is poised to conquer via Joshua's military leadership (Lev. 18:25). Furthermore, Israelite participation in Canaanite sexual practices results

in their own defilement and being cut off from their people (Lev. 18:26–30). The outcome is that *all* Canaanites are systematized as wicked and Israelite-Canaanite interactions are dangerous, putting Israelites at risk of defilement. In Joshua 2, the Canaanite Rahab is identified as a prostitute, thereby threatening Israelite purity.[15] Because of the Torah's totalized portrayal of Canaanites as wicked based on sexual practice, Rahab's profession as a prostitute and her encounter with the two male Israelites on her roof at night before they go to sleep (Josh 2:8) bring the potential sexual encounter between Canaanite and Israelite into view. For Israelite males, this encounter risks defilement and being cut off from their people. However, Rahab's story bypasses these concerns regarding Canaanite wickedness and Israelite defilement when it is read as a game. Although Rahab is labeled a prostitute, the story is not about Canaanite sexual practices or Israelite defilement. Rather, it involves interactive decision-making. The focus on the decision-making moves the story away from the systematic portrayal of Canaanites as a universally wicked group of people that put Israelites at risk of defilement. Thus, a gaming focus liberates Canaanites and Israelites from strategies that divide them, and presents an alternative vision for productive interactions that are neither illicit nor defiling.

Moreover, the game's suspension of sexual anxieties undercuts the rhetoric of Israelite superiority over the Canaanites based on sexual practice. The Levitical rhetoric indicates that if the Israelite (or anyone in the land) refrains from participating in wicked and defiling Canaanite sexual practices, they will "live" (Lev. 18:5, 26). Thus, Israelites gain an advantage over Canaanites by obedience to Israelite sexual coupling laws. However, the game reminds us that Rahab and the spies are gamers on equal footing with each other as they play together to arrive at a mutually beneficial payoff. As Rahab and the spies play the game in Joshua 2, there is no advantage to being an Israelite, Canaanite, male, or female. Sexual coupling laws are nowhere in view and no obedient or disobedient Israelites or Canaanites exist in the game. The Levitical othering strategies that divide Rahab and the spies collapse as they play the game. What carries the day is the skill with which players execute their cooperative strategies to obtain a mutually beneficial payoff. Thus, Levitical identity anxieties about Israelite/Canaanite mixing that seek to hold decisive sway over Rahab and the spies' loyalties and identities, such as Joshua as the military leader of the spies or Rahab's king, are of little consequence as the players game together.

Third, the cooperation between Rahab and the spies interrupts yet another potent rhetorical strategy that separates Israelites and Canaanites. This strategy is about the transmission of ethnic disgust to justify war and violence against the

ethnically defined "other." This strategy appears in the biblical laws about the sexual couplings within Israel and between Israelites and other ethnically defined people. Sarah Ahmed's work on cultural politics suggests that the linking of a person or a group of people with distasteful bodily functions creates aversion for the "other" person or group.[16] Many biblical laws and stories that attach aberrant sexual or distasteful bodily functions to another person or group solidify disgust in the majority person or group.

The transference of disgust has a twofold purpose. It draws a clear distinction between two individuals and groups, and it secures detachment between both individuals and groups. Biblical laws on sexual couplings, depicting Israelite revulsion for Canaanite people and their practices (e.g. Lev. 18:24–30; 20:22–26), link Israelite participation in illicit sexual practices to the land vomiting out the Israelites. Likewise, biblical stories of incest transfer disdain onto Israel's neighbors by drawing clear distinctions between them (e.g. Gen. 19:30–38). Yet Joshua 2, read with game theory in mind, undercuts these attitudes.

As noted in the previous section, Rahab and the spies play a game governed by decision-making, not sexual laws and regulations. Thus, the game teaches that there are no prohibitions that transfer disgust onto Canaanites. Both Israelites and Canaanites interact as people who are not bound by ethnic or gender distinctions. Gamers learn to cooperate on Rahab's roof outside the rigid othering strategy of biblical rules.[17] In short, the reading of Joshua 2 as a game challenges heteropatriarchal and geopolitical bravura; it subverts Israelite identity politics, and it interrupts the transmission of disgust and violence.

Toward a Reading of the Bible as a Game: A Conclusion

Game theory and its tools provide a basis for illuminating the decision-making landscapes and for analyzing the strategies of many biblical characters. For example, Hagar, Sarah, Abraham, and God play the game of securing offspring, blessings, and honor for themselves (Genesis 16; 21). As gamers, the biblical characters raise questions about the quality of their payoffs and whether or not their stories predict how Israel will coexist with its neighbors. Will it be a peaceful coexistence or a life with a "hand against everyone" (Gen. 16:12)? After she is cast out into the wilderness, how will Hagar's decision to return to Sarah play out in light of the Nash equilibrium? What will Lot's effort look like

to negotiate his family life in Sodom (Genesis 19), and how will God and Abraham negotiate with each other while Isaac's life hangs in the balance (Genesis 22)? Another question is how game theory assists in laying out the decision-making landscape for Aaron (Exodus 32) and Saul (1 Samuel 13) when their respective leaders are absent. Are their decisions about festivals and sacrifices that are as defective as their stories suggests? Whether the choices of biblical gamers and the biblical interpretation history promote loyalty to God or whether they highlight moral failure, the reading of biblical stories as games offers new possibilities for assessing the actions and the roles of the various female and male characters.

In other words, game theory helps in exploring and evaluating decision-making strategies for players when they read the Bible as a game. Providing a framework for the players, the game offers players various options that they explore to get to the desired outcome. Many gaming options are not disclosed in the biblical text, but players test the various decision-making options suggested by the story world. The gaming approach provides new portals through which players are invited to examine gaming acumen and ethics, moral frameworks, motivations, and actions of the various characters. Game theory thus encourages players to expose, critique, and destabilize a win-lose rhetoric found in biblical texts in which androcentric warrior bravura and various othering strategies are suboptimal strategies if the goal is to coexist with one's neighbors. When players game with Rahab and the spies, they encounter "othering" strategies and strategies for mutual cooperation. The question is which of the strategies secures the maximum payoff. By playing Joshua 2 as a game, readers learn to navigate strategies of domination that upset the wisdom, efficacy, and long-term viability of conquest as the best strategy when the goal is to survive and to coexist with one's neighbors in the land.

However, even as game theory destabilizes hierarchies between players and invites readers into new ways of evaluating the motivations and actions of the characters, the interaction of the gaming with feminist interests is potentially complex. On the one hand, cooperative gaming serves feminist interests by privileging the decision-making acumen of players over power-centered ethnic or gender binaries and distinctions. On the other hand, the activity of the gaming foregrounds interactive decision-making and may unwittingly obscure violence, thus reinforcing androcentric coercion and subjugation in the story world. As Rahab's story illustrates, the cooperative game Rahab plays with the spies undercuts "othering strategies." This kind of game stands in tension with the ending of her story. It reports that her people are nonetheless slaughtered

(justifiably?) while she lives on in Israel. Thus, Rahab may appear as an "obedient Canaanite" who voluntarily subjugates herself and her family to Israel. She even turns into a heroic figure, valorized in the Judeo-Christian canonical tradition.

To be sure, an androcentric Israelite text wants to retain control of Rahab even as she achieves her best payoff. Yet reading Rahab as a *gamer* resists any such finalized representation of her. Notwithstanding the violence perpetuated against Rahab's people, one cannot "un-see" how the interactive decision-making between Rahab and the spies interrupts the Joshua-styled conquest agenda of Israelite domination or elimination of *all* Canaanites. Bleeding through the ending of Rahab's story is the probability that, as a gamer, her continued presence in Israel does not depend on capitulating to Israel's deity but on her continued interactive decision-making acumen with others. Our experience of her as a gamer on equal footing with her Israelite partners casts suspicion on Joshua's report (and indeed other mentions of her in the Christian canon) of any facile assimilation into Israel. Gaming invites those with feminist interests to read Rahab as one who remains in a state of play with others, both Israelite and Canaanite. Through game playing, all of them resist power structures, conquests, and finalized identities by continuing to evaluate risks and obtain their best payoffs.

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[1] "Understanding Addiction: How Addition Hijacks the Brain," available at

https://www.helpguide.org/harvard/how-addiction-hijacks-the-brain.htm#pleasure. For a recent study on the effects of pro-social games, see Darcia Navaez, Bradley Mattan, Carl Macmichael, and Mary Squillace, "Kill Bandits, Collect Gold or Save the Dying: The Effects of Playing a Prosocial Video Game," *Media Psychology Review* 1.1 (2008): http://mprcenter.org/review/narvaez-prosocial-video-game/.

[2] John Dominic Crossan, *Raid on the Articulate: Comic Eschatology in Jesus and Borges* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1976), 26–28. Also see J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: The Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (London: Routledge, 1949).

[3] Steven Tadelis, *Game Theory: An Introduction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 4.

[4] The assumption that players will always choose the option that results in the maximum benefit is termed the expected-utility maximization theorem. For a discussion of decision-making strategies and a technical discussion of gaming theorems and corollaries, see Roger B. Myerson, *Game Theory: Analysis of Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

[5] For a history of traditional treatments of Rahab's character, see Marion Ann Taylor and Christiana De Groot, eds., *Women of War, Women of Woe: Joshua and Judges through the Eyes of Nineteenth-Century Female Biblical Interpreters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 19–54.

[6] Game theory coheres with queer theory in its destabilization of fixed identities. The following scholars discuss Rahab as a queer figure and one who transgresses notions of a fixed Israelite identity: Marcella Maria Althaus-Reid, "Searching for a Queer Sophia-Wisdom: The Post-Colonial Rahab," in *Patriarchs, Prophets and Other Villains*, ed. Lisa Isherwood (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), 128–40; Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993); Erin Runions, "From Disgust to Humor: Rahab's Queer Affect," in *Bible Trouble*, ed. Teresa J. Hornsby and Ken Stone (Semeia Studies 67; Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2011). For an evaluative analysis, see Susanne Scholz, "Convert, Prostitute, or Traitor? Rahab as the Anti-Matriarch in Biblical Interpretations," in *In the Arms of Biblical Women*, ed. Mishael Caspi and John Greene (Biblical Intersections 13; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2013), 153–84.

[7] The Prisoner's Dilemma is one among many types of games that offer analytical frameworks for observing decision-making strategies. Other basic gaming frameworks include: *Hotelling's Game* that explores how one maximizes advantage in a competitive situation, the *Bike Game* that analyzes the use of focal points much like a game of "chicken," the *Talmud Answer* that studies the equitable division of a contested sum, and Alan Turing's *Imitation Game*. For further information, see Presh Talwalkar, *The Joy of Game Theory* (Amazon Digital Services, 2013); A. M. Turing, "Computing Machinery and Intelligence," *Mind* 59 (1950): 433–60.

[8] Anthony Clayton, "What Is the Prisoner's Dilemma?," TEDed Video, Scientific American YouTube channel, https://ed.ted.com/on/HRm68N5l#review.

[9] The term "Nash equilibrium," as applied in game theory, is coined after the mathematician John Nash.

[10] Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 111–12.

[11] Robert Dodge, *Schelling's Game Theory: How to Make Decisions* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2012), 50–2.

[12] Gaming with Rahab and the spies illuminates a conflict between the "othering" conquering rhetoric in Lev. 18:24–30 and the rhetoric of negotiation in Lev. 19:33–34. In Lev. 19:33–34 the people God brings in to Canaan negotiate existence with strangers in the land rather than conquer them.

[13] Claudia Camp, *Wise, Strange and Holy: The Strange Woman and the Making of the Bible* (JSOTSupp Series 320; Gender, Culture, Theory 9; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 40–44.

[14] Ibid., 40–44.

[15] Phyllis A. Bird describes a prostitute in the biblical world as a "legal outlaw" who is considered marginal and a threat to priestly purity but not technically outlawed in Israel. For an overview of prostitution and problems in terminology and translation in the Hebrew Bible, see Phyllis A. Bird, "Prostitution in the Social World and Religious Rhetoric of Ancient Israel," in *Prostitutes and Courtesans in the Ancient World*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Laura K. McClure (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 2006), 40–53.

[16] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), 82–100; 154–55.

[17] Runions, *Bible Trouble*, 47. As Runions notes in her humorous reading of Rahab as a queer figure, the comic reversals in Rahab's story deconstruct the loftiness of the laws and the disgust they aim to transfer.

CHAPTER 19

ECOFEMINIST BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS FOR CYBORGS AND THE STORY OF JEZEBEL

ARTHUR W. WALKER-JONES

TINA Pippin characterizes Jezebel as the "archetypical bitch-witch-queen in misogynist representations of women" and asks: "What have we done with the story of Jezebel?"[1] More than twenty years later, Jezebel has morphed into Jezebel.com, a blog site for women, with the tagline: "Celebrity, Sex, Fashion for Women. Without Airbrushing." This transformation of Jezebel in cyberspace is a useful place to begin a discussion of ecofeminist approaches to biblical interpretation in our contemporary digital economy and culture. I say *begin* a discussion because not much has been written about the implications of digital media for ecofeminist approaches to the Bible. The digital humanities have become an established field with a growing body of literature on digital media theory.[2] In biblical studies, discussion has begun about the use of digital media in teaching and research.[3] Some biblical scholars have even begun to discuss the implications of digital media for biblical hermeneutics.[4] Yet, little has been written about the relationship between digital media and feminist biblical hermeneutics.[5] This essay, therefore, argues for the importance of developing an ecofeminist analysis of the impact of digital media on biblical interpretation and makes some suggestions about how such a digital, ecofeminist hermeneutics might proceed.

Donna Haraway's 1985 article, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," is a good place to start a discussion of ecofeminist, digital exegesis of the Bible, because it is a seminal work in both ecofeminism and the digital humanities. Haraway argues that progressives need to understand the rise of digital technologies, changes to modes of production, women's work, and the forms of digital domination in order to formulate effective responses to the contemporary exploitation of women. She uses the image of the cyborg as an "ironic political myth faithful to feminism" that articulates the "*pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and … *responsibility* in their construction."[6] Haraway, like other ecofeminists, considers the exploitation of women and nature to be interrelated in both theory and practice. On the level of theory, binaries like of male/female, human/animal, mind/body, reason/emotion, or culture/nature are interrelated. The items on the right-hand side (female, animal, body, emotion, nature) are identified together and are subordinated to those on the left-hand side (male, human, mind, reason, culture). Haraway speaks of the "confusion" and "construction" of boundaries, because she wants to confuse the binaries that legitimate oppression; But, rather than eliminate difference, Haraway instead reconstructs these binaries. In this respect, her position contrasts with some ecofeminists who either embrace the right-hand side and reject the left-hand side of the binaries, or want to do away with binaries altogether. In this sense, Haraway takes a mediating position. On the one hand, she does not reject outright the left-hand side because this would leave the social power of science, technology, and digital media to men. On the other hand, Haraway does not do away with difference but instead wants to rethink these differences ethically. As Val Plumwood explains, the oppressive use of binaries needs to be critiqued, but it is important to maintain some sense of difference in order to think and construct feminist philosophy and logic.[7] Similarly, Haraway wants women to take pleasure in science and digital media. She proposes the cyborg as a feminist myth because it confuses various binaries that legitimate oppression and can be used to think ethically about their construction.

This essay has three sections. The first part, "Jezebel the Cyborg," argues that the website Jezebel.com turns Jezebel into a cyborg and illustrates the way humans are becoming cyborgs, in a number of senses of the word. The second part, "Reading the Bible as Cyborgs," shows that the way digital media reshapes thinking and reading has precedents and echoes in feminist approaches to biblical criticism. The third part, "A Cyborg Reading of Jezebel," illustrates how a cyborg reader might interpret the biblical story of Jezebel (1 Kgs. 16:29–2 Kgs. 19:37).

JEZEBEL THE CYBORG

The website Jezebel.com turns Jezebel into a cyborg in three ways. First, a cyborg is a genetically modified and computer-enhanced human. When Haraway first wrote "A Cyborg Manifesto" in the 1980s, she spoke of the manipulation of genes, the rise of the internet, and the development of a digital economy. Today, the integration of humans with computers has become even more of a reality. People walk around with their eyes glued to their smartphones. They socialize online, shop online, do business online, read news online, and organize politically online. Indeed, social media has a major influence on social movements and political campaigns. Research shows that our use of digital media is changing the way we think and read. Jezebel's existence online as a website symbolizes the way people have come to live on the internet. As Carl Zimmer says: "Humans are 'natural-born cyborgs,' and the Internet is our giant 'extended mind.'"[8] We all become cyborgs in a digital world.

Second, cyborgs exist in a digital economy. For Haraway, the digital economy is characterized by two things: a homework economy and the feminization of labor.[9] The homework economy describes the propensity for more individuals to work from home on temporary contracts. Alternatively, the feminization of labor means that there are a growing number of low-paying jobs, long considered women's work, that are being filled by men. In these two ways, the digital economy erodes the middle class.[10] Even though a few women and people of color may rise to the top in the digital economy, most women and large numbers of men remain in precarious jobs. This is an example of the way the old male/female binaries do not hold anymore, even as new binaries emerge.

The website Jezebel.com illustrates the issue of women's work in the digital economy. The cozy relationship between Jezebel.com and digital capitalism is evident in the layout of the site. It intersperses articles with advertisements for consumer products. In addition, female employees of Jezebel have complained about being discriminated against within the Gawker media conglomerate that runs the website. The story is a familiar one. More men than women hold top positions, men are paid more than women for the same work, and men are more likely than women to be praised for their output. Even Jezebel's editor, Emma Carmichael, agrees that women do a lot of the writing on the site, but they remain in the background.[11]

The digital economy also affects the academic institutions in which many biblical scholars work. Academic institutions have more courses and programs

online and are employing more contract faculty and fewer full-time, tenure-stream faculty. Clearly academic work is becoming more precarious and I suspect many of these online courses are taught by women, visible minorities, and a growing number of men who are contract faculty, as is the case elsewhere in the digital economy. I do not know whether Gawker media will address these employment inequities, or whether academics will be able to address similar inequalities in academia, but the need for resistance is clear.

Third, the cyborg is a liminal figure that can be used to subvert patriarchy. Haraway acknowledges that the cyborg is the "offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism" and "the awful apocalyptic *telos* of the West's escalating dominations of abstract individuation, an ultimate self untied at last from all dependency, a man in space."[12] Still, Haraway argues for appropriating the cyborg and putting it to ecofeminist uses. Similarly, the figure of Jezebel has been used to control women throughout history. For instance, white, male slave owners in the United States created the contrast between the mammy and the jezebel "to control and dominate the female slave."[13] Jezebel.com, however, uses this name to subvert patriarchy. The website's tagline is "Celebrity, Sex, Fashion for Women. Without Airbrushing." By highlighting "sex" in the tagline, the site alludes to the patriarchal use of Jezebel to control female sexuality. It may even allude to Jehu's accusation that Jezebel engaged in "prostitutions" (2 Kgs. 9:22). As feminist interpreters observe, the accusation of "prostitutions" seems to come from the biblical association of apostasy with adultery,[14] as nothing else in the biblical story suggests that Jezebel commits adultery. In fact, the story portrays her as loyal to her husband. In addition, the website's emphasis on sex and women's fashion may allude to biblical Jezebel's painting her eyes and dressing her hair (2 Kgs. 9:30). Androcentric interpreters see Jezebel's makeup as an attempt to seduce Jehu, but the biblical story makes this interpretation unlikely. As Janet Howe Gaines says, "her sarcastic, sharp-tongued insult of Jehu disproves any interpretation that she has dressed in her finest to seduce him."[15] Jezebel accuses Jehu of being a traitor by addressing him as "Zimri" (9:31), an infamous traitor who died after reigning only seven days (1 Kgs 16:15–18). Thus, Jezebel's putting on makeup and doing her hair before meeting her death is not flirtatious, but a decision to assert her role as queen mother, to remain loyal to her family and to die with courage and dignity. As Gaines observes: "Jezebel is donning the female version of armor as she prepares to do battle. She is a woman warrior, waging war in the only way a woman can."[16] Like a cyborg, Jezebel is a liminal figure with origins in patriarchy. But the symbolic nature of her name also carries potential, like the

cyborg, for subverting patriarchy.

One of Haraway's main concerns in "A Cyborg Manifesto" is that elites will understand the internet as a way to control society through programming. In the wake of the effective use of social media in recent elections, Haraway's concern seems legitimate. To Haraway, women cannot afford to leave the digital world to men. Women need to use digital media in order to develop effective digital resistance. Jezebel.com is a cyborg in this sense of effective feminist digital resistance to patriarchy. It subverts the patriarchal interpretation of Jezebel as a dangerous and evil temptress and reappropriates her name to celebrate women's power and sexuality.

When I first read articles on Jezebel.com, I questioned the feminism of the writers. Ultimately, I realized this was a mistake. As an older, cisgender male, I was unaccustomed to the writers' "snarky internet speak."[17] I found the content of most of the articles similar to what appears in traditional women's magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*. I noticed few articles overtly featuring an intersectional feminist analysis. After the presidential election of Donald Trump in 2016, however, articles with this type of analysis appeared more frequently and were featured more prominently on the website. Several articles addressed the intersection of gender and race, important given the racist use of Jezebel's name to dominate and control female African American slaves.[18] One article, in particular, helped me recognize my error and appreciate Jezebel.com as a feminist cyborg: Julianne Escobedo Shepherd's article entitled "If You're Shocked *Teen Vogue* Is Great, You're Not Paying Attention." Shepherd reacted to male writers who expressed surprise on social media that an article in *Teen Vogue* was so intelligent and political. The article was Lauren Duca's "Donald Trump Is Gaslighting America."

Shepherd pointed out that *Teen Vogue* regularly publishes intelligent, intersectional feminist analysis and that Duca belongs to a new generation of writers emerging in the entertainment world. These writers publish feminist articles in major publications because that is what young women want. Shephard explains that *Teen Vogue* mixes intelligent, feminist, political analysis with the "publication's typically beautiful fashion spread, because aesthetics are not divorced from intellect."[19] When I read Shepherd's article, I realized that my assumption that feminists would not be interested in fashion was simply a reversal of the male/female binary, not a transformation of it. According to Shepherd, a new generation of feminist leaders are "emerging in the entertainment world in a way we've always hoped, and even better that they reflect the surge of non-famous teen girls who are doing the same."[20] She

maintains that the male surprise at Duca's article is "all part of the collective male media hegemony that puts women's magazines, no matter how serious, in the pink ghetto."[21] I too realized that I had placed Jezebel.com in a "pink ghetto," and that the intersectional analysis, which became apparent after the election of Trump, had been there all along. Their "snarky internet speak" is designed to get online attention, or clicks. The arrival of feminist analysis in the fashion and entertainment industry because a growing number young women want to read feminist analysis should be celebrated. The writers at Jezebel.com are cyborgs skilled at using the internet to advance feminist causes.

Reading the Bible as Cyborgs

Since Haraway's essay in 1985, many others have written about the way digital media changes the way people think and read. Some of their insights into cyborg reading strategies are similar to feminist approaches. First, cyborg readers do not recognize authorial intention. Claire Clivaz explains the way modern methods assume that printed books relate to conceptions about authorship, ideas, and literary works.[22] She shows that the assumption of authorial intentionality "has led us to forget that the concrete conditions of production and circulation of written texts have always had the last word over all kind[s] of wishes and desires of the person or group that produced a text. … The author's wishes and historical readings/receptions can strongly differ."[23] Clivaz uses as an example Stanley Fish's reflection on his first blog post. "Blogs," says Fish, "are provisional, ephemeral, interactive, communal, available to challenge, interruption and interpolation, and not meant to last; whereas in a professional life now going into its 50th year I have been building arguments that are intended to be decisive, comprehensive, monumental, definitive and, most important, all mine."[24] Fish recognizes that the use and interpretation of a blog, even more so than a book, is not something an author owns and controls. Similarly, Jezebel.com illustrates that authorial intent does not determine the contemporary meaning or function of texts. While I doubt we can know what the Deuteronomistic Historians intended, it is probably safe to assume that their intentions behind Jezebel are far different from the meaning and function of Jezebel's name on Jezebel.com. For cyborgs accustomed to reading online, therefore, authorial intention does not limit or determine the meanings and social functions of biblical texts.

Second, cyborg readers question objectivity and seek transparency. Clivaz

names objectivity as one of the basic assumptions of contemporary, book-centered reading. Feminist biblical interpreters, however, have long recognized that claims of *objectivity* represent power plays because they treat male perspectives as the norm. Therefore, many feminist exegetes endorse the importance of critically analyzing an interpreter's social location. Similarly, digital media theorist David Weinberger asserts that "transparency is the new objectivity."[25] Why trust someone claiming to be objective, when they can simply follow hyperlinks or google the evidence? Instead of objectivity, people seek transparency.

Third, cyborg readers understand and shape the social functions of readings. Feminist biblical interpreters recognize that supposedly objective historical readings are actually male perspectives and therefore understand the need to analyze the contemporary social function of texts. Tina Pippin traces the use of Jezebel "against medieval women and slave women and Southern women who break with tradition."[26] She begins her article with "an informal survey of college students, Atlanta area artists, and members of both Episcopal and southern Baptist congregations" on their associations with Jezebel.[27] Those surveyed overwhelmingly identified "Jezebel" as a negative figure. Pippen ends the article by asking whether Jezebel's story "is continually recolonized" by these communities. Alternatively, Jezebel.com suggests that this name can be decolonized online. Ecofeminist biblical interpretation needs more surveys of the history of textual reception and their impact on women and nature. These could include not just informal surveys but rigorous quantitative and qualitative studies of the contemporary social functions of particular texts, in order to understand and shape the social and political power of biblical interpretations.

Fourth, cyborg reading is hyperlinked. This means that cyborg readers often follow a series of links online, perhaps never reading any one web page in depth. Some scholars lament that this type of hyperactivity, jumping from page to page as evidenced by video games and the Internet, encourages shallow thinking.[28] N. Katherine Hayles, however, argues that the Internet does not necessarily make people's thinking shallower, but does change how people think. She characterizes the change in cognitive modes from deep attention to hyper attention[29] and describes this shift in relation to the attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD) spectrum. Persons with AD/HD are easily bored and thus seek continual stimulation. Drugs prescribed for AD/HD are cortical stimulants that prevent a person from becoming bored and seeking new stimuli. Hyper attention represents a shift toward the AD/HD side of the spectrum. Hyper attention is a condition by which a person switches focus rapidly among

different tasks and prefers multiple information streams, seeking a high level of stimulation and having a low tolerance for boredom."[30] Alternatively, deep attention, "the cognitive style traditionally associated with the humanities … is characterized by concentrating on a single object for long periods (say, a novel by Dickens), ignoring outside stimuli while so engaged, preferring a single information stream, and having a high tolerance for long focus times.

Webpages tend to encourage hyper attention. They are written and read differently because of the use of hyperlinks. In their work, authors provide links to supplementary or supporting information, rather than write about context. Readers can follow these hyperlinks to site after site, perhaps never completely reading any one text. This approach seems to encourage intertextuality. It suggests that intertextual readings may become increasingly prevalent in cyberspace. Some feminist biblical exegetes use intertextual approaches, and hyperlinks facilitate and intensify intertextuality. Similarly, Jezebel's story in 1 and 2 Kings can be read in a web of hyperlinks connecting it to ancient and modern contexts.

Fourth, cyborg readers have greater visual acuity. In addition to hyperlinks, the digital world features pictures, videos, and digital recordings. Although texts still play a major role, visual imagery accompanies these texts. Clivaz notes that, prior to the modern period, literacy was understood more holistically to encompass not just the ability to read and write, but also the ability to create and understand speeches and artwork.[31] In digital cultures, more holistic literacies develop, ones that include enhanced visual literacy. People may already be developing the ability to process images more rapidly. In the 1960s, the conventional wisdom in Hollywood was that an image had to be on the screen at least twenty seconds for an audience to process it. Now as movies have become digital and moved from theatres onto television, computers, and mobile devices, the time people take to process an image is closer to two or three seconds.[32] Images are fundamental to metaphors and biblical scholars often refer to cognitive linguist George Lakoff's argument that metaphors shape people's thinking and acting in the world.[33] Metaphors are also fundamental to literary critic Northrop Frye's understanding of the power of literature.[34] Frye and Lakoff's assertions are, admittedly, contested by others, but both at least raise the question of whether imagery has always been part of the power of literature. Accordingly, the cultural power of Jezebel's story is due to the poignant and gruesome images it produces. For instance, Jezebel puts on makeup and dresses her hair to prepare for death. Also, her hands and head are left after being eaten by dogs. With the increase of visual images online and in social media, readers

of texts may become more adept at the interpretation of images. In fact, the Jezebel website shows that feminists are skilled at reading these images "against the grain," thereby reinterpreting the figure of Jezebel.

Finally, cyborg readers recognize the importance of interpretations that blur the male/female and other interrelated binaries. In this context, the nature/culture binary is particularly important, since digital media seemingly legitimates the patriarchal dream of man detached from Earth. As Haraway puts it, the militaristic and patriarchal cyborg is "the awful apocalyptic *telos* of the West's escalating dominations of abstract individuation, an ultimate self untied at last from all dependency, a man in space."[35] By contrast, ecofeminist cyborgs take pleasure in their dependency on, and relationship with, other species and Earth. Humans with digital devices have bodies that breathe air, drink water, and eat food. They take pleasure in their dependence on, and relationship with, other species. For instance, humans depend on the microbiome in their gut to digest food. Unless they are vegan, their food likely comes from domestic animals in factory farms. Even vegans benefit from medical procedures and medicines tested on other animals. Ecofeminist cyborgs also recognize and lament their impact on Earth. The disposal of digital devices pollutes the water humans drink and the air they breathe. Manufacturing and running computers and other smart-devices require vast quantities of energy, mostly from fossil fuels that contribute to global warming; they thus put human survival at risk. Ecofeminists recognize the interrelationship of the exploitation of women and the environment. At a time in history when climate change, species extinctions, and related ecological crises threaten the future of humanity, ecofeminist cyborgs prefer readings that confuse male/female, human/animal, and nature/culture binaries in order to construct a more livable future.

A Cyborg Reading of Jezebel's Story (1 Kgs. 16:29–2 Kgs. 19:37)

The first part of this article used the website Jezebel.com as an illustration of Donna Haraway's proposal that the cyborg could be a feminist political myth. Haraway proposed the cyborg because it is a liminal figure that blurs the boundaries between binaries that legitimate oppression. The second section noted intersections between feminist interpretation and digital media theory and concluded by noting the importance of the nature/culture binary for

ecofeminism. In *A Companion Species Manifesto*[36] Haraway coins the word "naturecultures" to articulate how companion species blur the lines between nature/culture and associated binaries. Accordingly, the following section of the paper applies these insights to an interpretation of the biblical story of Jezebel under the headings: naturecultures, binaries, and liminal figures.

Naturecultures

Patriarchal interpreters often impose a strong nature/culture dualism on Jezebel's story by interpreting the story as a conflict between Elijah's religion of *history* and Jezebel's religion of *nature*. They identify Jezebel with nature. Denigrating her, they marginalize nature and women. The story, however, does not depict a conflict between the God of history and a nature god, but over which God is present in nature. In other words, the story is not about culture versus nature, but God's presence in a natureculture.

Far from separating nature and culture, the narrative repeatedly emphasizes their interrelationship and interdependence. Note, for instance, that drought, famine, and the need for rain are major issues for the Israelite culture. Immediately following Jezebel's marriage to Ahab and his subsequent conversion to the worship of Baal and Asherah (1 Kgs. 16:31–33), Elijah announces a drought in the land (17:1–7). Jezebel's country, Sidon, also suffers from drought, which becomes clear when God sends Elijah to the widow of Zarephath (17:8–16). Her effort to gather sticks for a final meal shows that drought is a life and death issue. In addition, God sends Elijah to announce the end of the drought to Jezebel's husband and he then returns to a "severe famine" in Samaria (18:2). The drought ends when the contest of Elijah with the prophets of Baal proves God's superiority. Further, the subsequent rain shows that Israel's God has power to resolve the drought. After God answers Elijah on Mount Carmel, Elijah announces the coming of rain to Ahab, bows down with his face to Earth, and sends his servant seven times to look for rain clouds on the Western horizon. In short, religion and ecology are interrelated in this story, as God provides life-giving rain.

The companion species that make possible the Israelite natureculture are evident throughout the entire story. Wheat, olive oil, horses, cattle, and dogs feature prominently. First, the widow of Zarapheth has only flour and oil. Obadiah provides the prophets with bread (1 Kgs. 18:4). Emmer wheat and

olives are domestic species adapted to a dry, Mediterranean climate and human populations depended on them for life. In other words, the domestication of wheat and olive trees makes possible this particular natureculture.

This narrative also repeatedly associates war and the monarchy with horses. Ahab sends Obadiah looking for grass and water for his horses and mules (1 Kgs. 18:5, 13). Ben Hadad marches against Samaria with horses and, after he is injured, he escapes in his chariot with the cavalry. When Jehu approaches Jezreel, the kings Joram and Ahaziah send out messengers on horses. They follow in their chariots and each, in turn, tries to escape in a chariot. Finally, horses trample Jezebel. The domestication of horses made possible the rapid transport of goods and information, and horses were a formidable weapon of war. Thus the horse was essential to maintaining a royal social structure both as a means of rapid transport and as a weapon of war. Thus the horse is evidence that Israel's royal society is not separate from nature, but is a natureculture.

Similarly, the presence of cattle further evidences the inclusion of a natureculture in the narrative. In contemporary Western culture, cattle are kept primarily for meat and dairy products. However, cattle were originally domesticated for traction, plowing, and threshing, and this is how they are often portrayed in the Bible.[37] Cattle made possible the breaking of ground that otherwise could not have been farmed and provided essential labor and fertilizer. When Elijah meets Elisha, Elisha has twelve yoke of oxen (I Kgs. 19:19). The number of oxen indicates that Elisha is from a wealthy family and speaks of the agricultural abundance oxen made possible. Similarly, both Elijah and the prophets of Baal sacrifice young bulls (1 Kgs. 18:23). Thus both Canaanite and Israelite religions acknowledge the importance of oxen by making them sacred offerings to God. That both religions treat cattle as important sacrifices suggests they recognize human dependence on them. Young bulls need to be killed annually to maintain the carrying capacity of the land, so it is historically likely that their sacrifice maintains the ecological niche. Cattle are, therefore, further evidence of an integrated natureculture.

Dogs also play a key role in the narrative. In fact, the story seems obsessed with people being eaten by dogs. Elijah prophesies that dogs will lick Ahab's blood just as they lapped up Naboth's blood (1 Kgs. 21:19). Furthermore, dogs eat Jezebel (21:23) and anyone else associated with Ahab who dies in the city (21:24).[38] The prophecy against Jezebel is repeated at the anointing of Jehu (2 Kgs. 9:10), and these prophecies are all fulfilled. Ahab's blood is washed from his chariot and licked up by dogs (1 Kgs. 22:38). Although Jezebel's death is delayed several chapters after the death of her husband, she is also eaten by dogs

(1 Kgs. 9:36). Considering the coevolution of dogs with humans, biblical accounts traditionally have an unusually negative view of these animals. According to current evidence, the beginnings of the domestication of dogs may go back approximately 32,000 years and the domestication of the direct ancestors of current dogs from European gray wolves may go back around 20,000 years when *Homo sapiens* were still hunter-gatherers during the last ice age.[39] Since dogs were domesticated millennia before other species, they seemingly played a key role in human evolution. They provided many services, including warning of approaching intruders, helping in the hunt, herding other domestic animals, removing refuse, and providing companionship, for which they were valued in many cultures. Dogs may have given humans the idea that other species could be domesticated, too. Perhaps the negative view of dogs in Israel resulted from the natureculture of a walled city in which dogs were no longer used to hunt or herd and no longer needed to warn of intruders. Nevertheless, the presence of these animals in this narrative is further evidence of the existence of a natureculture.

As previously mentioned, patriarchal interpretations heighten the nature/culture dualism by interpreting the story as a conflict between a nature god and the God of history. But, the narrative indicates a conflict over whether God's natureculture extends to more than one ecosystem. The ministers of the king of Aram explain their defeat by saying: "Their God is a God of mountains" (1 Kgs. 20:23).[40] God responds: "Because Aram has said, YHWH is a God of mountains but is not a God of the plains, I hand over to you this great multitude, and you will know that I am YHWH" (20:28) and the Israelites are indeed victorious in the plains. As if to emphasize that Israel's God is not limited to a particular ecosystem, the narrative also depicts Israel's God providing for the widow of Zarephath in Sidon, Baal's territory, and, in the opposite direction and ecosystem, as repeatedly providing for Elijah in the desert. Far from being separate from nature, God is active in multiple ecosystems. In short, Israel's religion is part of a particular natureculture that is inclusive of several ecosystems.

Patriarchal interpretations that separate culture from nature read the story of Naboth's vineyard as a clash between human tribal and royal societies. However, the narrative makes clear that the conflict is between different naturecultures. The characters Jezebel and Naboth represent these competing naturecultures. The narrative identifies Jezebel as the daughter of the king of Sidon, as part of a foreign royal social structure. Her city of origin sits on the edge of the ocean, made affluent by commercial sea trade, fisheries, and more annual precipitation

than Jerusalem. The ecological location of the city makes possible its affluence and royal social structure. The ecological location of this natureculture creates a religion based on a god imaged as a storm over the ocean. By contrast, Naboth's community is based on the dry land of the mountainous hinterland, used primarily for agriculture. While Israelite religion sometimes uses the imagery of Baal, it also understands God as coming from, and uniquely present at, a mountain in the desert (1 Kgs. 19:8–18). The mixture of imagery for God may reflect Israel's aspirations of building a monarchy like Sidon's on the foundation of an older tribal system adapted to dry land agriculture. Naboth has a vineyard. Grapes are adapted to dry land agriculture and Ahab wants to make Naboth's vineyard into a vegetable garden. Naboth represents an older tribal system that stresses the holding of land for future generations. This tribal system may be a cultural adaptation that recognizes the value of intensive, intergenerational labor for maintaining the ecological niche of dryland agriculture. Naboth and Jezebel's conflict is thus a conflict of naturecultures.

Binaries

Although the preceding discussion emphasizes that patriarchal interpretations usually heighten the nature/culture dualism of the biblical story, as we have seen, this text actually integrates nature and culture into a natureculture. Even so, binaries are still present in the story. Phyllis Trible acknowledges:

> If the Society of Biblical Literature gave awards for excellence in polarized thinking, the Deuteronomistic theologians would capture first prize. With rhetorical purity and power they subsumed centuries of traditions, diverse genres, and points of view under the severe rubric of opposing concepts: life and death, blessing and curse, good and evil, obedience and disobedience.[41]

The story of Jezebel's death is full of literal and figurative polarities that construct an Israelite natureculture. For instance, Jezebel sits at a palace window overlooking the gate of the city. In the context of ancient Near Eastern iconography, the narrator may identify her with Asherah or the boundary between life and death.[42] The wall of the palace marks the boundary between royalty and commoner, private and public space. Similarly, the wall of the city marks the boundary between urban and rural, culture and nature. When Jezebel is thrown out of the window, trampled by horses, and eaten by dogs, she descends literally and symbolically to the wrong side of many polarities. By

being thrown out of the palace, she moves from royalty to commoner. Her movement from queen to commoner is emphasized by her being trampled by horses, which symbolize royalty. Since the palace wall is built on the edge of the city, Jezebel also descends from culture to nature. When she is eaten by dogs, she is identified with nature and other animals. Although the prophecy said she would be “like dung” (2 Kgs. 9:37), she is eaten by dogs which literally turn her into dung.[43] When Jehu comes in through the gate and Jezebel is thrown outside it, the scene identifies Jehu with urban culture and civilization and Jezebel with nature. Thus literal and figurative boundaries police the difference between male and female, native and foreign, culture and nature, human and animal, true and false religion.

Liminal Figures

While patriarchal interpretations emphasize these binaries, a cyborg reader notices the holes in the boundaries and the liminal figures that blur the distinctions in the text. Among the liminal figures in Jezebel’s story are dogs. They are marginal figures across many cultures, patrolling the boundary between life and death. One example is Anubis, the Egyptian god of the afterlife, who has a canine head. Another is Cerberus, the three-headed dog guarding the gates of Hades in Greek mythology.[44] The Deuteronomistic history frequently mentions dogs eating dead bodies and this experience may be a reason they are associated with the boundary between life and death. Because dogs look like wolves but live with humans, dogs are often liminal figures on the human/animal boundary. As liminal figures, dogs can do cyborg work online. In English, the word “bitch” places women on the animal side of the human/animal polarity. Yet, the website Bitchmedia.org does feminist work online. This website, a part of Bitch Magazine, offers a “Feminist Response to Pop Culture.” Both Bitch and the dogs eating Jezebel illustrate the long and varied culture of associating women with dogs. Bitchmedia.org makes the word “bitch” into a cyborg doing feminist work online. That Jezebel was eaten by dogs could be read as dishonoring her by identifying her with the animal side of the polarity. One irony, however, is that the image of her mutilated hands and head are so gruesome that it cannot be forgotten. Cyborg readers recognize that the dogs immortalize Jezebel by creating an unforgettable image. These dogs blur the boundaries between life and death, human and animal, and preserve the image of Jezebel for subsequent

reinterpretation by websites like Jezebel.com.

Finally, Jezebel herself is a liminal figure. She is an Israelite queen of foreign origin who transgresses male/female boundaries by wielding power in the public sphere. As her death approaches, her liminal status is symbolized by her sitting at a window in the palace wall. Normally women, even royal women, were confined to the private sphere of the palace. But, in her death, Jezebel passes through the window into the public sphere. Jezebel is a liminal figure situated at a window between various literal and figurative boundaries. Thus dogs and Jezebel are all liminal figures capable of transgressing and confusing the polarities that structure oppression.

In addition to liminal figures, the rhetorical logic of the narrative contains holes that might lead a cyborg reader to question the binaries and construct them differently. Stanley Frost notes that the biblical narrative treats the actions done in the name of Baal as ethically wrong, but those conducted in the name of God as right. For example, Jezebel's killing of the prophets of God is wrong, but Elijah's killing of the prophets of Baal is right.[45] Readers, however, may be horrified by the violence, thereby questioning this logic. They may be shocked as Jehu casually eats immediately after killing Jezebel and later has the seventy children of Ahab beheaded, their heads heaped in two piles outside the city gate (2 Kgs. 10:7). The cyborg asks: who is the hero here? In sum, the story of Jezebel does contain several binaries. However, liminal figures confuse the boundaries between these binaries and questionable rhetorical logic leads cyborg readers to identify with Jezebel rather than Elijah. This interpretation of the Jezebel story is also found in cyberspace. Jezebel.com's implicit interpretation of the figure of Jezebel rejects the patriarchal use of the name, repurposing it to celebrate women's style, intelligence, and power.

Conclusion

This essay explores the importance of an ecofeminist analysis of the impact of digital media on biblical interpretation and suggests how an ecofeminist cyborg approach might proceed. The first part of the essay reviewed Donna Haraway's seminal work on the cyborg and used Jezebel.com as a contemporary example. It suggested that all of us are cyborgs using computers as our extended minds and living in a digital economy. Because digital culture is pervasive, feminists need to develop effective resistance. Haraway proposes that the cyborg, as a political myth, blurs the binaries structuring various forms of oppression. This can be

seen in the Jezebel website, that makes Jezebel into a cyborg engaged in online, feminist resistance. The second part of the paper surveyed some recent research in digital media and its implications for feminist biblical exegesis. It found that digital media encourages more intertextual/hypertextual and metaphorical readings capable of shaping social function by blurring the binaries that have legitimated oppression, especially the female/male and nature/culture binaries. The third part of the paper showed that the biblical story of Jezebel depicts a natureculture with liminal figures and rhetorical gaps that lend themselves to a cyborg reading consonant with the online feminist work of Jezebel.com.

Given the lack of previous research and discussion of feminist digital hermeneutics, this essay, like Stanley Fish's blog, is "provisional, ephemeral, interactive, communal, available to challenge, interruption and interpolation, and not meant to last."[46] This essay focuses on hermeneutics, but future feminist analysis needs to investigate how digital media impacts research and teaching. Digital media theory and the digital humanities are rapidly developing research areas, and feminist biblical scholars must be informed by and contribute to this research. Feminist digital approaches to the Bible will undoubtedly develop in rich and manifold ways. But, on the brink of this planet's ecological apocalypse, it will be particularly important for feminist cyborgs to blur not only the boundaries between female and male, but between nature and culture. This critique challenges the exploitation of our planet, in order to imaginatively and responsibly construct a more livable future for our world.

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CHAPTER 20

SEXUALITY, STONING, AND SUPERSESSIONISM IN BIBLICAL EPIC FILMS OF THE POST–WORLD WAR II ERA

ADELE REINHARTZ

In the two decades after the end of World War II, Hollywood studios entertained Americans with numerous epics based on the grand narratives of Western civilization. Many of these epics drew upon stories from both the Jewish scriptures and the New Testament. Like other epic films, Bible movies were headlined by major Hollywood stars such as Gregory Peck, Susan Hayward, Yul Brynner, and Gina Lollobrigida. They featured casts of thousands, overwrought emotion, and exceedingly high budgets. Further, like all adaptations of the time, these movies added lavish detail to their biblical sources, including elaborate subplots and highly developed themes. While some of these additions are based on legends and interpretative traditions that go back to other ancient sources, many are the fruit of the filmmakers' imaginations.[1]

Some Bible epics, such as Nicholas Ray's Jesus epic *King of Kings* (1961), or George Stevens's *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965), retell the Gospel story. Others, such as *Samson and Delilah* (Cecil B. DeMille, 1949), *The Ten Commandments* (Cecil B. DeMille, 1956), and *Esther and the King* (Raoul Walsh, 1960), are based on well-known stories from the Jewish scriptures. These films themselves are sometimes viewed as "Jewish" due to their subject matter.

Yet, any viewer familiar with the New Testament or Christian tradition will recognize that these films include significant Christian elements despite being set in the pre-Christian era. In *The Ten Commandments*, for example, Yochabel, Moses's Hebrew mother, recites a prayer that paraphrases Mary's Magnificat in Luke 1:46–55: "Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed" (Luke 1:46–49). Moses himself recites a line from Lev. 25:10: "Go, proclaim liberty throughout all the lands, unto all the inhabitants thereof!" This verse is most familiar to general audiences from its paraphrase at the end of the New Testament Gospel of Matthew. There the risen Jesus exhorts his disciples: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 28:19–20, KJV).[2] These elements reflect the Christian understanding of the Jewish scriptures as the "Old Testament" whose stories and prophecies are fulfilled by, or at the very least point towards, the New Testament and the belief in Jesus as the messiah. By injecting Christian motifs into films based on biblical stories that Jews see as their own, filmmakers appealed to Jewish audiences that may well have been oblivious to the Christian echoes. In doing so, however, the films also imply that these biblical stories are important because they point toward Christianity. For this reason, the Old Testament epics convey subtle Christian supersessionism according to which Christians are the true heirs of the biblical tales.

Another feature of many Bible epics from the mid-twentieth century pertains to the strong female characters. While Jesus epics leave little scope for major female leads, Old Testament films develop their female protagonists, such as Eve, Delilah, and Esther, to resemble the feisty American women who joined the workforce when their men went off to fight in World War II, and who were re-domesticated after the war to conform to the postwar ideals of gendered family life.[3] Accordingly, these female figures in the films, whether primordial, pagan, or Israelite, are often remade into pious Christian women through the addition of New Testament motifs as filtered through twentieth-century Christian sensibilities.

This essay examines how the twin motifs—supersessionism and gender hierarchy—dominate three films, *David and Bathsheba* (Henry King, 1951), *Solomon and Sheba* (King Vidor, 1959), and *The Story of Ruth* (Henry Koster, 1960). The films, like other biblical epics, insert Christian motifs into a story from the Hebrew Bible. For instance, the film *David and Bathsheba* refers repeatedly to David as God's anointed king. The film, *Story of Ruth*, is set in Bethlehem, where a mysterious prophet appears pointing ahead to the momentous events to take place some millennia later. In *Solomon and Sheba*,

Sheba quotes the Lord's Prayer: "For thine is the power and the glory. Forever."[4]

These three films, however, feature yet another major motif that is entirely absent from the biblical sources. In each case, the female protagonist is sentenced to death by stoning for the crimes of adultery (Bathsheba), idolatry (Ruth), or both (Sheba). The sentence is pronounced by the proto-Jewish authorities and threatened (in the case of Ruth and Bathsheba) or carried out (in the case of Sheba) by the local populace. The protagonists have two additional points in common. First, each of these women undergo a conversion experience of sorts, whether from paganism (Sheba and Ruth) or from sexual immorality (Bathsheba), and are thus portrayed as undeserving of punishment. Second, they are all rescued from the bloodthirsty crowd by a man who has a connection to the Davidic ancestry attributed to Jesus. David rescues Bathsheba; Boaz and Solomon do the same for Ruth and Sheba respectively.

Although the stoning motif is absent from the biblical stories on which these three films are based, the filmmakers did not invent it. Leviticus 20 specifies stoning as the punishment for idolatry (20:2) and adultery (20:10). Nevertheless, I argue that this cinematic motif, and the scenes in which it is played out, draw directly from the New Testament *Pericope Adulterae* (John 8:1–11) in which a woman is accused of sexual immorality, sentenced to death by stoning, and rescued by Jesus, the Davidic messiah. I also claim that this motif not only adds drama to these films, but conveys the messages of supersessionism and gender hierarchy, two common features of the Old Testament epic genre. The movies rely on John 8:1–11 to Christianize their biblical sources, and in doing so promote the values of postwar Christian America with regard to women and Jews. The stoning motif therefore becomes one way in which the Old Testament epics reinforce gender hierarchies and Christian supersessionism.

THE *PERICOPE ADULTERAE* IN JOHN 8:1–11

Scholars generally agree that the *Pericope Adulterae* is not original to the Gospel of John. It is absent from many early Greek Gospel manuscripts and from a significant number of Old Latin manuscripts. It appears in most modern printed versions after John 7:53, but is usually enclosed in brackets, relegated to a footnote, or otherwise set off from the main body of the text. Nevertheless, John 8:1–11 is one of the best-known Gospel stories.[5] In a sermon entitled, "The Woman Caught in the Act: Christ Speaks to the Problem of a Judgmental Spirit," Ray Pritchard notes that the story of Jesus and the woman taken in adultery "is

so popular that even those who rarely read the Bible know about it."[6] Furthermore, Pritchard states: "Our text also contains one of the most famous statements of Jesus: 'Let him who is without sin cast the first stone.'"[7] The popularity of this New Testament story ensured that most twentieth-century viewers recognized the stoning scenes in the epics as a variation of the New Testament passage. They would have expected, or at least hoped for, the woman's rescue by the male hero, just as Jesus saved the accused woman in John 8:1–11.

The Gospel story describes a confrontation between Jesus and "the scribes and Pharisees" that took place one morning as Jesus taught in the temple area (8:1–2). The Jewish leaders bring a woman caught in adultery before the crowd, and they address Jesus as follows: "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" (8:4–5, NRSV). The narrator explains: "They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him" (8:6). Jesus writes on the ground with his finger as they continue to question him. He then stands up and states: "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her" (8:7). Then he bends down again to write on the ground. One by one, the elders and leaders depart until Jesus is alone with the woman (8:8–9). No one condemns the woman, and Jesus advises her to "[g]o your way, and from now on do not sin again" (8:11). The passage raises many interesting questions. Why did Jesus write on the ground and what did he write? Why did the Jewish authorities omit the woman's partner from consideration, when the law they are citing (Lev 20:10) specifies that both the man and the woman must be punished?

For our purposes, however, the importance of the story lies in the structure of the relationships among the three parties involved: the Jewish authorities, the accused woman, and Jesus. The scribes and Pharisees initiate the confrontation by bringing the woman before Jesus and the crowd. They invoke biblical law, and challenge Jesus to give his judgment. Their main concern is not to uphold the law or condemn adultery, but to entrap Jesus. If they succeed in manipulating him into arguing against the death penalty, he will damage his credibility as a teacher and lose the confidence of the crowds that gather to listen to him.

However, their attempt to sabotage Jesus' authority fails. Instead of responding to their question, Jesus sets a trap of his own. He does not judge the woman but passes judgment on the authorities. His declaration, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her," characterizes the scribes and Pharisees as sinful. Even worse, he calls them out for hypocrisy.

They seek to punish the woman for sinning although they are sinful themselves. In confronting them in this way, Jesus forces them to retreat. The scribes and Pharisees bow to Jesus' authority when they accept his judgment of their guilt. Jesus thus demonstrates that he possesses the ethos and the knowledge required to teach others, and that he is superior in every way to his Jewish adversaries.[8]

In short, the story depicts a contest between Jesus and the Jewish authorities, and it is the authorities that blink. The woman in the story is not important. Powerless in relation to all the men in the story, she merely provides the occasion for the confrontation. The passage does not criticize the law as such, but it depicts the Jewish authorities as rigid, uncaring, hypocritical, and antagonistic toward both the woman and Jesus. By contrast, Jesus is clear-eyed, clever, and compassionate. He acknowledges the woman's sin, but gives her the chance to repent when he prevents her painful death by stoning.

The potential of this pericope to inscribe supersessionism and anti-Judaism is evident in the way it often appears in contemporary sermons. For instance, in a sermon, entitled "The Adulterous Woman," Dave Miller, a Christian preacher, refers to the scribes and Pharisees as a "motley crew" who "with their notorious and repeatedly documented hard-heartedness would not have been deterred if Jesus simply had conveyed the idea: "Hey, give the poor woman a break, none of us is perfect, and we've all done things we're not proud of."[9] In Miller's view, the heartless scribes and Pharisees had the audacity to divert her case from the proper judicial proceedings and to humiliate her by forcibly hauling her into the presence of Jesus, thereby making her a public spectacle. Miller argues: "Jesus was striking at precisely the same point that Paul drove home to hard-hearted, hypocritical Jews in Rome: 'Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things' (Romans 2:1)."[10] Miller's easy equation of the scribes and Pharisees with "the Jews" of Rom. 2:1 indicates the anti-Jewish and supersessionist tenor of his sermon.

To be sure, some contemporary Christian preachers recognize the anti-Jewish potential of John 8:1–11. In a sermon on "how to avoid anti-Jewish preaching," Dave Barnhart cautions Christians to "avoid attributing legalism, violence or other negative qualities to the Jewish faith or the Hebrew Bible."[11] He states: "Christians often assert that our 'New Covenant' supplanted the Old. But Jewish parents love their kids, spouses and neighbors just the way Christians do—imperfectly, passionately and with a measure of grace. Jews manage to avoid stoning adulterers and disobedient children because they have a mature and nuanced understanding of how the Bible should guide their lives."[12]

The *Pericope Adulterae* and the Bible Epic film

The stoning motif in the three epic films under discussion exhibits the same structural features as the New Testament passage.[13] As in the *Pericope Adulterae*, the woman's guilt in each film is not in doubt. Bathsheba (Susan Hayward) admits that she hoped to seduce David by bathing on the rooftop. Sheba (Gina Lollobrigida) worshipped pagan gods and lived with Solomon although they were not married. Ruth (Elana Eden) had indeed been a priestess in the Moabite temple to Chemosh. In all three films a faction within the proto-Jewish "Judahite" hierarchy initiates the proceedings against the woman. Like the Gospel scribes and Pharisees, they adhere rigidly to the letter of punitive laws with the intention of undermining or entrapping the male protagonists. In contrast to Jesus in the *Pericope Adulterae*, the male protagonists in each film have a romantic interest in the accused women. Still, like John 8:1–11, the women escape lethal punishment only through the intercession of men. More importantly, these men—Boaz, David, and Solomon—are Jesus' direct ancestors. These points suggest that the films allude to the *Pericope Adulterae* rather than the more general biblical concept of stoning as punishment for serious crimes. The following presents a detailed examination of the three films and their reliance on the New Testament pericope to advance problematic views of Jews and women consistent with the sensibilities of mid-twentieth-century America.

David and Bathsheba (1951, dir. Henry King)

The epic film *David and Bathsheba*, based on 2 Samuel 11, shows David's sexual encounter with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah. After spying on the bathing Bathsheba, David summons her for a one-night stand. Upon learning that she is pregnant, David calls Uriah back from the front in the hope that the officer will sleep with his wife and claim the child as his own. When this plan fails, David arranges Uriah's death on the battlefield.

To this story and its aftermath, the film adds a frame narrative that depicts David as having a troubled faith. Through flashbacks the film assures viewers

that in his youth, at the time of his victory over Goliath, David had a strong faith in God. As he grew up, however, he lost this faith and became a confirmed rationalist. In an early scene David witnesses the Ark of the Covenant as it is brought into the city. When a soldier reaches out to steady it and promptly dies, Nathan the prophet attributes this death to God's will whereas David is convinced that the man died because he was drunk and overheated. By the film's conclusion, however, David repents of his skepticism and returns to the faith of his youth. Themes of drought and relief echo David's spiritual journey; drought depicts God's displeasure at David's loss of faith and rain operates as evidence of divine forgiveness. Notably, David's spiritual journey is not taken from the biblical account. The conflict between faith and reason, however, is prominent in mid-twentieth-century epics that associate religious skepticism and rationality with Communism.[14]

Another major departure from the biblical text concerns the character of Bathsheba. In 2 Samuel 11, Bathsheba is silent and almost completely passive. The narrative is entirely disinterested in whether she is pleased or not with the king's attention or whether she is aware of or oblivious to the fact that she is bathing within David's sight.[15] Her only explicit act is to send David a message about her pregnancy. Yet, the film presents her as daringly and deliberately seducing David. By this point in the film, Uriah has already appeared as an earnest and humorless soldier. This portrayal prepares viewers to accept Bathsheba's account of their marriage as loveless and joyless. Whereas the biblical source does not allude to any emotional or romantic connection between David and Bathsheba, the film justifies the adultery by stressing their passionate love for one another.

This reasoning ameliorates the moral dilemma that the story's romantic pairing of David and Bathsheba created for American film censors. According to the Production Code that governed the American film industry from the 1930s to the late 1960s, adultery "must not be explicitly treated, or justified, or presented attractively."[16] Yet this film justifies adultery and murder on the grounds of love. Hollywood censors allowed the film to pass because, the story is based on the Bible.[17] To the dismay of the British press the same grace was granted by British censors:

> Far from protecting young people from seeing an immoral story on the screen this Code-satisfying film becomes pernicious glorification of the intrigues and meanness of David and Bathsheba. All under the guise of a Great Love. … The British Censor should have given the picture one of his "X" certificates to prevent young people from having their moral values debased.[18]

As in the biblical story, the plot of the film revolves around adultery and its consequences. Importantly, it exhibits the same relationship structure as the *Pericope Adulterae* although the details differ. In both the Gospel story and the film, the woman's guilt is never in doubt. In the film, the prophet Nathan denounces Bathsheba. He insists that "she also must expiate her sin." David objects that "[s]he has lost her child. Is that not enough?" Yet it is not enough for Nathan to assert: "Bathsheba has sinned and she must render payment according to the Law of Moses." When David takes full responsibility for the death of Uriah, Nathan again repeats: "She was a faithless wife." But David does not give up, insisting that Bathsheba was faithless "only because I made her so. Could she deny the king? When I called her, could she refuse to obey my commands?" After he underscores Bathsheba's powerlessness, the king appeals to their love and distinguishes between sin and evil: "But even if she sinned she has done no evil. She came to me with love and tenderness. She lifted up my heart. She has brought no evil with her." Still, Nathan is unmoved: "She has brought adultery and murder. She has brought the drought and the famine. She has brought the wrath of God upon Israel."

As this dialog takes place, the crowd is cheering and shouting, and bloodlust has taken hold. David tries another approach, asking Nathan: "Where are the accusers? Under the law, they must cast the first stone. Where are those who will say that I knew Bathsheba before our marriage? Who will dare to say it to my face? So there are no accusers. You have none." David's words to Nathan paraphrase Jesus' words in John 8:6–10. Yet, in the end David fails to persuade Nathan, and his plan to rescue Bathsheba falls to naught. David throws himself upon God's mercy, God forgives him, the drought ends, and Bathsheba is saved. The film therefore casts Nathan, along with the elders, as rigid legalists whereas David and his supporters emerge as merciful humanists. God casts the divine vote on the side of mercy, forgiving David and overturning Bathsheba's death sentence. As in John 8:1–11, a man from the house of David intercedes to overturn the harsh sentence imposed on a woman by the (proto) Jewish authorities. In striking a blow for compassion over against callousness, the movie reinforces the message that women are and should be dependent on men for their well-being.

Solomon and Sheba (1959, dir. King Vidor)

According to 1 Kgs. 10:1–13, the Queen of Sheba paid a diplomatic visit to King

Solomon. She brought him many gifts, admired his wisdom, received gifts from him and then left, never to be heard from again, at least, not in the Bible. Later Jewish, Christian, and Muslim texts and traditions greatly elaborated upon this brief encounter. According to Josephus (*Ant*. 8.165–73), the Queen of Sheba was also the queen of Egypt and Ethiopia, and she was the first to bring balsam to Israel. In his allegorical commentary on the Song of Songs, Origen identified the bride of the Canticles with the "queen of the South" of the Gospels, who is identified with the Queen of Sheba and also assumed to have been Ethiopian. The Quran portrays her as accepting Solomon's beliefs and abandoning the worship of pagan gods, and numerous texts speculate that she bore a child fathered by Solomon.[19]

Some of these traditions find their way into this film, thereby significantly expanding the biblical story. In *Solomon and Sheba*, the country of Sheba is subordinate to Egypt. The Queen (also called Sheba) is ordered to entrap Solomon and to deliver him and his country into the Pharaoh's hands. If she succeeds, she will be richly rewarded. Meanwhile, Solomon pursues his own agenda. He hopes to convince Sheba to abandon paganism and take on the worship of the one true God. In keeping with the romantic conventions of the epic genre, they fall in love and begin a torrid affair. Sheba shifts her allegiance from the Pharaoh to Solomon. Initially, she continues to abide by her pagan beliefs and practices. She cajoles Solomon into allowing her to hold the orgiastic festival dedicated to her god Rha-Gon in Jerusalem. Solomon's advisers, as well as the gentle Abishag, strongly disapprove of the queen, fearing that she is leading Solomon into idolatry. God also disapproves. Lightning strikes the Temple, Abishag dies in the disaster, and the country is plunged into famine.

The concern over Solomon's penchant for women and idolatry is based on the biblical critique of Solomon in 1 Kgs. 11:1–9. There the narrator notes that "King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women" from the nations with whom God had forbidden (11:2), and that "his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not true to YHWH his God, as was the heart of his father David" (11:4; translation mine). In his weakness, the biblical Solomon even facilitates and participates in the worship of the pagan gods Astarte, Milcom, Chemosh, and Molech for the sake of his wives (11:5–8).

In the film, Sheba eventually abandons paganism and turns to the God of Israel out of her love and concern for Solomon. By this point, Solomon is drawn into war against his brother and rival Adonijah, who is allied with the Pharaoh against Solomon. On the battlefield, the tide seems to turn towards Adonijah,

who prematurely declares Solomon dead and himself the new king. He returns to Jerusalem and stirs up the people against both Solomon and Sheba. As Sheba stands at the Temple's entrance, the people pelt her with stones, condemning her for idolatry and adultery. But then a miracle occurs! Solomon returns victorious, having avoided death on the battlefield, and prays to God on Sheba's behalf. She is wondrously healed of her wounds, becomes pregnant with Solomon's child, and returns to Sheba where her son will reign over a country devoted to the worship of the one true God. In keeping with both the letter and the spirit of the Production Code, Sheba repents of her former idolatrous and licentious life, paying a suitably heavy price for her immoral past.

The relationships among Solomon, Sheba, and Adonijah reflect those in the *Pericope Adulterae*. In this case, however, Adonijah, the king's brother, rival, and the villain of the film, stands in for the Jewish authorities. For this reason, the stoning of Sheba, which Adonijah instigates, does not have even the veneer of legal process that is present in John 8:1–11. This aspect softens the supersessionist message. However, *Solomon and Sheba,* as a whole, stresses the theme of female domestication even more strongly than the other two films. Not only does Sheba require a man to rescue her from death, she also recognizes the superiority of patriarchal rule. Although she is strong and assertive at the outset, Sheba's final act upon divine instruction transforms the Sheban matriarchy into patriarchy. In the words of Babington and Evans: "Sheba repents, converts to Judaism, returns home to destroy matriarchy for the sake of patriarchy."[20]

The Story of Ruth (1960; dir. Henry Koster)

The biblical story of Ruth, set "in the days when the judges ruled" (Ruth 1:1), focuses on Naomi, a woman from Bethlehem, who settles in Moab with her husband Elimelech and two sons Mahlon and Chilion to escape famine. After the death of her husband and sons, Naomi decides to return to Bethlehem where the famine subsided at that point in the film. Her daughter-in-law Ruth, the widow of Mahlon, refuses to return to her Moabite family and implores Naomi to allow her to accompany her to the land of Israel. She even pledges that "your people shall be my people, and your God my God" (1:16). Upon their return, Ruth gleans in the fields of a kinsman named Boaz and when a rival kinsman gives up his claim (4:3–8), she marries him and gives birth to a son who will be the

grandfather of the future king, David.

The epic film version of the story adds a lengthy and elaborate prequel that describes the life of the young Ruth as a pagan priestess in Moab, her romance with Mahlon, and the events cementing her decision to accompany Naomi to Bethlehem. As a child, Ruth had been chosen as a sacrifice to the Moabite god, Chemosh. To her dismay, a mysterious rash thwarts this destiny. Disqualified from serving as a sacrifice, Ruth becomes a priestess in the temple charged with preparing other girls for that role. There, she meets the young man Mahlon, whose family's goldsmith business provides the sacred objects for the temple. They fall in love and he teaches her about his God. At first, she dismisses his ideas as foolish nonsense. But gradually she becomes interested and even attracted to them. With her new sensibilities, she becomes distressed at the practice of child sacrifice and flees the pagan temple. The Moabites, arresting Elimelech, Mahlon, and Chilion, condemn them to hard labor in the quarries. Ruth tries to escape with Mahlon, but to no avail. They marry hurriedly before Mahlon dies. Ruth's backstory sets the stage for the major source of tension in the drama. When Ruth and Naomi return to Bethlehem, the townspeople are highly suspicious of Ruth on account of her Moabite past. Although Ruth has forsworn the gods of Moab, the elders put her on trial for idolatry.

In this film, the main issue is xenophobia, expressed in the Judahite hatred of Ruth. From Ruth's first entrance into Bethlehem, the local women barely contain their suspicion and dislike. Yet, they keep their feelings under control until they receive confirmation of her prior idolatrous life from two travelers who claim to be Bethlehemites. Carrying torches, the mob chases after Ruth, shouting that her presence among them has angered God who brought drought upon them. The crowd then accuse her to the elders, insisting that idolatry is a stoning offence. Boaz is asked to give the deciding judgment, to cast the first stone, so to speak, but he spares Ruth by unmasking the witnesses as Moabites.

In *The Story of Ruth*, the law about stoning the idolater is juxtaposed with the law requiring care for the stranger. The film emphasizes that the former ought to be obeyed maximally while the latter should not. This contrast places the emphasis not on whether law *per se* is good or bad. The film assumes that the law is divinely given. Rather, the films depict how the Judahites position themselves in relation to both laws. Those who persecute the outsider are portrayed as violent and inhumane. The townspeople who want to stone Ruth fall into this group, as indeed does Boaz before he meets Ruth. Those who champion the stranger are portrayed as welcoming and merciful. The main representative of this group is the more mature Boaz, who, having fallen in love

with Ruth, believes that her conversion is sincere and that she deserves compassion and a second chance. The film implies that those who stand on the side of the stranger also stand in line with divine intentions.

Like *David and Bathsheba* and *Solomon and Sheba*, this film presents the elders, Boaz, and Ruth in the same structural relationship as the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus, and the woman in John 8:1–11. Of the three films considered here, this movie is most explicit in its supersessionist message by repeatedly referring to the residents of Bethlehem as Judahites. Because of the phonological connection between "Judahites" and "Jews" the film conveys supersessionist notions about Jews even though it condemns the blood-thirsty people among the Judahites. The film suggests that there is nothing wrong with Jews as such. Yet, people who subscribe to the merciful aspects of the law are "better" than people who rigidly follow the law's punitive aspects. The film even acknowledges that the law *per se* is divinely given. But it also teaches that some laws, especially those promoting good relationships with strangers, are "good" laws that should be obeyed, in contrast to other laws, especially about the stoning of idolaters, that should be ignored.

Finally, like the other two films, *The Story of Ruth* domesticates its female protagonist. Throughout the film Ruth makes her own decisions. She marries Mahlon, follows Naomi, and gleans in the fields. Even at the end of the movie, Ruth is instrumental to her own deliverance as she identifies the two false witnesses. Still her happiness depends on Boaz's ability to ensure that the rival kinsman relinquishes his claim to her.

Conclusion

The structural and thematic similarities suggest that the three films draw directly on the *Pericope Adulterae* of John 8:1–11 in both the presence and the details of the stoning plot line that they insert into the biblical stories. This stoning motif draws attention to a paradox. On the one hand, the movies portray biblical heroes as strong, compassionate, and faithful to God.[21] Insofar as Boaz, David, and Solomon are also claimed as forerunners of the Jewish people, these films can be perceived as positive representations of Jews in the post-Holocaust era when overt anti-Semitism was frowned upon.[22] On the other hand, these heroes are in conflict with compatriots characterized by empty piety, rigid legalism, and harsh judgment. The virtues exhibited by these heroes are valued by Christianity whereas the traits of their enemies conform to long-standing anti-Jewish

stereotypes. The films can therefore claim to rise above anti-Semitism while they also suggest that Christianity is the rightful heir to the values of (Hollywood's version of) the Old Testament. In this way the films convey a subtle supersessionism in which the virtues of compassion and love that mid-twentieth-century Christian America associated with Christianity are valued above the rigid adherence to particularistic laws that Christian America attributed to traditional Judaism.

The stoning motif also contributes to the filmic valorization of patriarchy and female domesticity. This aspect is also paradoxical. On the one hand, the female protagonists are feisty, strong-willed, and assertive. These traits were associated positively with American women who went off to work in factories or otherwise helped in the war effort during the Second World War. On the other hand, all three women must be rescued—from death in the case of Bathsheba and Sheba and from a potentially unhappy marriage in the case of Ruth—by powerful men of the house of David, just as the woman of John 8:1–11 must be rescued by their most illustrious descendant, Jesus. The stoning motif implicitly defines gender hierarchies and the re-domestication of women as biblical and therefore divinely mandated values.

Twenty-first-century audiences may view these films as corny, cute, and camp. In their day, however, these and other Old Testament epics, notably DeMille's iconic *The Ten Commandments*, were enormously popular. Because they were often taken to be authoritative accounts of the biblical stories on which they were based, these films also became a medium for conveying patriarchy and supersessionism as positive biblical values. Recognizing the dangerous potential of these films should make us more sensitive to the values, whether constructive or dangerous, that viewers absorb with every watched movie.

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[1] DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* (1956) drew extensively on the works of Philo, Josephus, and rabbinic literature for many details, a point which, he claimed, added authenticity to his film. DeMille's sources are documented in Henry S. Noerdlinger, *Moses and Egypt: The Documentation to the Motion Picture "The Ten Commandments"* (Los Angeles, CA: University of Southern California Press, 1956).

[2] This film, and most other Bible movies, quote the King James translation of the Bible (KJV).

[3] On women in postwar America, see Nancy Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, Vol. 4 (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2006), 493–554. See also Catherine Gourley, *Gidgets and Women Warriors: Perceptions of Women in the 1950s and 1960s* (Minneapolis, MN: Twenty-First-Century Books, 2008), 16–41.

[4] Although the phrase "the power and the glory" appears in 1 Chron. 29:11 and Psalm 63:2, most audiences recognize this line as the last line of the Lord's Prayer: "For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever amen." This line is not present in of Matt. 6:8–15, the main source for this prayer, but it was added later in the liturgical tradition. For a history of the prayer, see David Clark, *On Earth as in Heaven: The Lord's Prayer from Jewish Prayer to Christian Ritual* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017).

[5] For detailed discussion of the history of transmission, see Jennifer Wright Knust and Tommy Wasserman, *To Cast the First Stone: The Transmission of a Gospel Story* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018). See also Jennifer Wright Knust, "Early Christian Re-Writing and the History of the Pericope Adulterae," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 14.4 (2006): 485–536; David Alan Black, *The Pericope of the Adulteress in Contemporary Research* (Library of New Testament Studies 551; London / New York, NY: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016). For an echo of this passage in a more recent Hollywood film, see Jeffrey L. Staley, "Reading 'This Woman' Back into John 7:1–8:59: Liar Liar and the 'Pericope Adulterae' in Intertextual Tango," in *Those Outside: Noncanonical Readings of Canonical Gospels*, ed. George Aichele and Richard G. Walsh (New York, NY: T&T Clark International, 2005), 85–107.

[6] Available online at https://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/the-woman-caught-in-the-act-christ-speaks-to-the-problem-of-a-judgmental-spirit/ [accessed May 19, 2018].

[7] Available online at https://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/the-woman-caught-in-the-act-christ-speaks-to-the-problem-of-a-judgmental-spirit/ [accessed May 19, 2018].

[8] His writing on the ground remains a mysterious detail, but perhaps it demonstrates that he is literate. For a thorough discussion of this aspect of the story, see Chris Keith, *The Pericope Adulterae, the Gospel of John, and the Literacy of Jesus* (New Testament Tools, Studies and Documents 38; Leiden / Boston, MA: Brill, 2009).

[9] Dave Miller, "The Adulterous Woman" (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press, 2003). Available online

at http://www.apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?category=75&article=1277 [accessed May 19, 2018].

[10] Ibid.

[11] See, the commentary by Dave Barnhart available at http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/5944/how-to-avoid-anti-jewish-preaching [accessed May 10, 2018].

[12] Ibid.

[13] The most famous stoning scene in the Bible film genre is the scene in *Monty Python's Life of Brian* (1979) in which Brian, his mother, and many of their compatriots look forward to the stoning of a blasphemer as their afternoon entertainment after hearing Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. One suspects that the Pythons included this motif as part of their spoof of the epic film genre.

[14] Adele Reinhartz, *Bible and Cinema: An Introduction* (London / New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), 98–99.

[15] For literary analyses of the biblical story that speculate about the role of Bathsheba, see David M. Gunn, "Bathsheba Goes Bathing in Hollywood: Words, Images, and Social Locations," *Semeia* 74 (1996): 75–101. See also the discussions in J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)Versions of Biblical Narratives* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1993); J. Cheryl Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women* (Second rev. ed.; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2012).

[16] Leonard J. Leff and Jerold Simmons, *The Dame in the Kimono: Hollywood, Censorship, and the Production Code* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1990), 285.

[17] Jeffrey Richards, *Hollywood's Ancient Worlds* (London / New York, NY: Continuum, 2008), 101.

[18] *The Evening News* (December 1, 1951), as quoted in Richards, *Hollywood's Ancient Worlds*, 103.

[19] For detailed discussion, see Deborah M. Coulter-Harris, *The Queen of Sheba: Legend, Literature, and Lore* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2013); Jacob Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba: Boundaries of Gender and Culture in Postbiblical Judaism and Medieval Islam* (Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism; Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

[20] Bruce Babington and Peter William Evans, *Biblical Epics: Sacred Narrative in the Hollywood Cinema* (Manchester / New York, NY: Manchester University Press / St. Martin's Press, 1993), 69.

[21] Babington and Evans, *Biblical Epics*, 34.

[22] Reinhartz, *Bible and Cinema: An Introduction*, 43.

CHAPTER 21

NOAH NARRATIVES, GENDER ISSUES, AND THE HOLLYWOOD HERMENEUTIC

ANTON KARL KOZLOVIC

THE ascendancy of moving image culture within this second century of the "Age of Hollywood"[1] fosters the exciting interdisciplinary field of religion-and-film,[2] which provides a proverbial breath of fresh air into centuries-old Scripture studies and their over-reliance upon historical, literary, and ideological-critical methods. Although these methods are still important, this emerging field provides exciting new insights into Holy Writ that can be gleaned by examining the, especially when they make certain features explicit that were, in the original narrative, implicit or totally missing. In effect, filmmakers engage in what contemporary theologians call a hermeneutic of imagination in their creative attempts to understand the Bible, making it aesthetically palatable to the paying public, and reaping profits for their financiers. Feminist biblical scholar Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza describes this artistic process as follows:

> A hermeneutic of imagination retells biblical stories, re-shapes religious vision, and celebrates those who have brought about change. To that end it does more than utilize historical, literary, and ideological-critical methods, which focus on the rhetoric of religious texts and their historical contexts. It also employs methods of storytelling, role-playing, bibliodrama, Midrash, pictorial arts, dance, meditation, prayer, and ritual for creating a "different" religious imagination.[3]

Thus, filmmakers create their different religious imaginations using commercial feature films as their creative palette, what could be termed "the Hollywood hermeneutic." This approach is a distinctive audio-visual subset of "imaginative

hermeneutics" according to the Fiorenza-inspired terminological schema of Rosa Cursach Salas.[4]

In sum, Hollywood history is filled with biblical epics of various subgenres, styles, and aesthetic hues.[5] Each of these films, offering an array of religious imaginations, are worthy of scholarly examination because of their pedagogic potential for both film studies and religious studies. The popular cinema is the *lingua franca* of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, whose interpretations would be foolish to ignore, churlish to deny, and a gross pedagogic waste if thoughtlessly disregarded.

Noah Narratives and the Popular Cinema

One of the most crowd-pleasing topics within Judeo-Christian film history, and apocalyptic fiction, is the archetypal disaster story of Noah's ark (Genesis 6–9). The narrative involves God, Noah, and his family building a life-sustaining ark (according to a boatload of instructions—Gen. 6:14–21; 7:1–3)[6] filled with a menagerie of wild animals, followed by world-cleansing via cataclysmic global flood, and the perilous survival-cum-regeneration of humanity. This diluvial "myth of a second fall,"[7] featured in many mythologies worldwide,[8] provides a deluge of delights for devotees and non-religionists alike. Of interest is the gender portrayal of its eight human survivors; especially considering the Bible's androcentric, patriarchal biases. As Kevin Harris laments:

> [I]n the whole saga of the flood and the ark (Genesis 6–9) Noah and his sons are continually named [i.e., "Shem," "Ham," "Japheth"], but the identities of the only four people saved with them out of the first period of human existence—that is, the grandmother [Noah's wife] and the three mothers [the sons' wives] of the whole human race to follow—were neither recorded nor considered in their own right. Regardless of who these women were or what they did, it was considered sufficient to recognise them only in terms of the relationship they bore to their husbands.[9]

In the spirit of a hermeneutic of suspicion and a hermeneutic of remembrance/retrieval, what does the Noachian cinema highlight in their translations from sacred text to silver screen? Productions have been rendered in multiple forms, whether epic bio-pic, scriptural fantasy, or sacred subtext, portrayed in many permutations including silent, surround sound, black-and-white, and color film.[10] However, for the purposes of this research, eight notable productions are selected for investigation: (1) *Noah's Ark* (1928), (2) *The Green*

Pastures (1936), (3) *When Worlds Collide* (1951), (4) *The Bible: In the Beginning …* (1966), (5) *Noah's Ark* (1999), (6) *Northfork* (2003), (7) *Evan ALMIGHTY* (2007), and (8) *Noah* (2014).

Noah's Ark (U.S., dir. Michael Curtiz, 1928)

This black-and-white, semi-silent, biblical classic offers a "realistic" parallel melodrama contrasting Noah's narrative with the Great War (WWI). Or, as an intertitle midway through the film declares: "The Flood and the War—God Almighty's Parallel of the Ages." Both performances concern extraordinary destructive forces that nearly extinguish humanity.[11] This biblical disaster story uniquely unfolds with a beached ark, Noah's family worshipping beneath a covenant rainbow, and two scene-setting intertitle quotations, namely: "And the Lord [sic][12] said … I will not again curse the ground any more for man's [sic] sake … neither will I again smite anymore everything living, as I have done … Gen. Chap. 8[:21]," followed by: "I do now set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth … Gen. Chap. 9[:13]." The film ends with the "City of Akkad in the land of Ur of the Chaldees" quickly destroyed by inundation (but *not* for "forty days and forty nights"—Gen. 7:12), which awed contemporary audiences with its liquid ferocity.[13]

This penultimate scene is followed by an unnamed, modern-day minister (Paul McAllister) clutching his Bible, piously preaching: "That was the end of a world of lust and sin—God made his [sic] covenant and the rainbow appeared in the heavens." McAllister then offers the following entreaty to the war-torn world: "Above this deluge of blood, and the graves of ten million men, shall not the rainbow of a new covenant appear—the covenant of peace?" Earlier, McAllister makes numerous references to Noah and the flood, while in the parallel biblical drama, he plays the role of Noah—another pious man who served God. This Noah is white-haired and bearded, mystically powerful, and an authoritative leader (see Figure 21.1). But confusingly, the director Michael Curtiz inserts some non-Noah scenes. These include the Tower of Babel (quoting "Gen. Chap. 11[:4]"), a Jesus statue and text referencing Mark 4:39, DeMillean-style golden calf worshipping (cf. Exod. 32), mountain-climbing-cum-burning-bush scenes (cf. Exod. 3:1–4), plus twin stone tablets (cf. Exod. 31:18) that mystically turn into three self-separating book pages filled with flaming, God-

inscribed, English text quoting (in truncated and out of scriptural sequence) Genesis 6:17 on page one, 6:14 and 6:18 on page two, and 6:19 on page three.

FIGURE 21.1 A mystical Noah.

These confusing scriptural references also extend to Noah's sons. In the biblical narrative, they are referred to as "Shem, Ham and Japheth" (Gen. 5:32), with Ham being described as "his younger son" (Gen. 9:24). Alternatively, director Curtiz lists them as "Japheth, Ham and Shem, mighty men and blessed of God." All three brothers are strong, fit, white, and dressed in caveman-style animal skins (see Figure 21.2). Shem (a.k.a. "The Balkan," Malcolm Waite) is more heavily bearded with LHS dress support (unlike his brother's RHS supports), Ham (a.k.a. "Al/Albert Wilson," Gwynn Williams) is lightly bearded, whilst Japheth (a.k.a. "Travis," George O'Brien) is clean shaven, and the film's main star in a bromance with his two beefy brothers. He is also romantically linked to "his betrothed" (but *not* wife) Miriam (a.k.a. "Marie," the top-billed Dolores Costello) whereas neither Shem nor Ham display any warmth towards their (implied) wives.

FIGURE 21.2 Noah's three sons—Ham, Japheth, and Shem.

One convoluted non-scriptural sub-plot involves Japheth trying to rescue the captured Miriam from the predatory King Nephilim (a.k.a. "Nickoloff," Noah Beery) when he selects her as a virgin sacrifice to ritually appease "the mightiest of our gods, Jaghuth" (*not* "Jehovah"). This B-plot has Miriam transform from a modestly dressed handmaiden (see Figure 21.3) into an erotically dressed sacrifice (see Figure 21.4), akin to her WWI job as a sexy showgirl (see Figure 21.5). Simultaneously, she is Japheth's love object (to be nurtured), and King Nephilim's sex object (to be martyred).

FIGURE 21.3 Miriam, Japheth's modestly dressed betrothed.

Unfortunately, Japheth's heroic rescue mission fails miserably; he is speared, captured, and blinded, Samson-like (Judg. 16:21). Meanwhile, Noah, Shem, and Ham quickly complete the ark *without* the captured Japheth and Miriam, but with the tangential assistance of the remaining household females, Noah's youthful wife and two smiling (supposed) daughters-in-law (eroticism-lite, see Figure 21.6).

FIGURE 21.4 Miriam, the erotically dressed sacrifice of King Nephilim.

Another unscriptural expansion portrays a fiery moat from God (akin to Moses's pillar of fire—Exod. 13:21) that protects the ark from destruction by King Nephilim's soldiers. Later, Japheth is "accidentally" freed due to the ferocity of the flooding and is divinely guided through the rains to a similarly freed, but stereotypically helpless Miriam, for a heartfelt romantic reunion.

FIGURE 21.5 Marie, the WWI–dancing-showgirl wife of Travis.

Thereafter, Japheth's blindness is miraculously restored via a heavenly beam of white light, presumably from God, the ark doors open and the lovers safely reunite with the rest of their family ready for rescuing-cum-planetary repopulation.

FIGURE 21.6 Noah's wife and two (supposed) daughters-in-law.

Noah's wife and the two remaining (supposed) daughters-in-law have no credits, personal names, dialogue, or significant screen-time other than brief God-worshipping, post-beaching (Gen. 8:20), walking-by during ark construction, and perfunctory housework inside the pre-floated ark. Nor does the film indicate the personal piousness of these women nor their intimacy with their husbands. Rather, they are displayed as "good-girl" contrasts to the erotic Miriam. In short, their scant scriptural roles are duplicated onscreen.

The Green Pastures (U.S., dir. Marc Connelly/William Keighley, 1936)

Based on a collection of southern literary sketches by Roark Bradford, *Ol' Man Adam an' His Chillun*, and following a successful stage play adaptation, this Depression-era African-American film utilizes an all-black cast (and a black choir singing spirituals) to fancifully (*not* literally) depict the Hebrew Bible through Deep South-style pastoral eyes.[14] Its anthropomorphized black "Lawd God Jehovah" (Rex Ingram) has short white hair and beard, carries a walking cane, smokes 10-cent cigars, and wears a Westernized business suit with hat.[15] The film opens with children and a Bible-toting minister, Mr. Deshee (George

Reed), walking pass an animal-themed circus sign on their way to Sunday school. Later, the film depicts “De Lawd” visiting the angelic children in heaven during a “fish fry” picnic, whereupon De Lawd whimsically creates Earth, humanity, and explores biblical vignettes. Of note is the film’s depiction of the Flood. In this vignette, the film confronts worldly wickedness partially personified by the church-avoiding, cologne-reeking, ukulele-strumming Zeba (Edna M. Harris), the “great-great-granddaughter of Seth” (see Figure 21.7). When an unrecognized De Lawd confronts Zeba, she disrespectfully calls him “country boy,” “banjo eyes,” and “old-time gal hunter.”

FIGURE 21.7 Cheeky good-time girl, Zeba.

The suit-wearing, beardless, and bespectacled “Noah” (Eddie Anderson) also encounters the unrecognized Lawd and invites him home for dinner (see Figure 21.8). Upon entering Noah’s home, De Lawd meets Noah’s wife (Ida Forsyne). Although she has no personal name, in the film she is lovingly referred to as “the old lady,” “honey,” and assessed to be “a pretty good woman” by Noah and “a fine wife” by De Lawd. In this scene, Noah’s wife personifies domesticity, service, and civility. But beyond this household scene, and her boarding the ark (see Figure 21.9), Noah’s wife effectively disappears. Similarly, the film eschews the roles of her daughters-in-law, the wives of “Shem, Ham and Japheth” (identified in biblical order—Gen. 5:32). Although they seemingly enjoy regular Sunday dinners, and help with the ark, the film omits their names and participation in the daily life of the family.[16]

FIGURE 21.8 Noah, De Lawd, and Noah's wife.

Furthermore, the film excludes these women from the divine deliberations. It is Noah who identifies humankind's "loose living" troubles, leading men to fight, loaf, gamble, and make bad liquor and women to make love-powder, beg, borrow, or steal money for gambling. Upon this revelation, De Lawd promptly reveals his holy will and decrees the world's destruction by deluge stating: "I'm a God of wrath and vengeance" (cf. Nah. 1:2). De Lawd only provides an exemption for Noah's family, because they are "the only respectable people in the world" (cf. Gen. 7:1). Further, De Lawd commands Noah to build "a boat" and fill it with provisions and animal pairs. Here, the film comically highlights Noah's drinking problem (cf. Gen. 9:21) when he thrice requests "two kegs of liquor," ostensively for medicinal and boat-balancing purposes, until De Lawd loses patience and sternly decrees, "One keg!"

FIGURE 21.9 Noah's wife and daughters-in-law entering the ark.

The film does *not* depict the ark's construction (a house with huge smokestack atop a very small boat). During loading, Noah's "crazy" family are publicly mocked, especially by the two-timing Zeba and her murderous boyfriend, "Cain the Sixth" (Al Stokes). Resistant to ridicule, the (semi-illiterate) Noah and sons dutifully check the (scrawled) animal inventory (see Figure 21.10) and load the ark with supplies and chosen creatures (herded in two by two with individually written labels per pairing)!

FIGURE 21.10 Preacher Noah and sons checking the animal inventory.

All three sons are hardworking, beardless, boyish, and respectfully respond to

Noah with “Yes sir Daddy” when he calls (in biblical order), “Shem” (Ray Martin), “Ham” (Dudley Dickerson), and “Japheth” (Jimmy Burress). All three wear hats, work clothes, and (later) raincoats when (alphabetically) wrangling the animals (zebras being the last loaded). Surprisingly, Noah’s wife and only *two* of the sons’ wives (all acting uppity) are screened boarding the ark. Its world-destroying inundation is musically evocative, visually unimpressive, but symbolically effective as the ark floats safely upon the drowned world until it quickly beaches atop a mountain with a rainbow shining brightly overhead. But only Noah, De Lawd, and the angel Gabriel (Oscar Polk) are shown on-board the ark; no further scenes of Noah’s family or disembarking animals occur.

When Worlds Collide (U.S., dir. Rudolph Maté, 1951)

This Oscar-winning science fiction gem[17] opens with sonic gravitas, fierce flames, and an ornate, red-leather “Holy Bible” (accompanied by thunder, lightning, and heavenly choir) that displays the following calligraphic verses:

> And God looked upon the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. [page turns] And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth. … [Gen. 6:12–13]

This *overt* scientific story with a *covert* Noah narrative concerns Dr. Emery Bronson’s (Hayden Rorke’s) astronomical discovery of a giant onrushing star, Bellus (analogously, God’s hand—Is. 66:2), on a collision course with Earth (analogously, God’s destructive design—Gen. 6:7). Orbiting Bellus is an Earth-sized planet, Zyra, which will bypass the apocalyptic conflagration and potentially provide a new home post-devastation. The scientific community ridicule these findings and the warnings of its aging Noah-figure, American astronomer Dr. Cole Hendron (Larry Keating), while smug United Nations members treat him as an attention-seeking, end-of-world “crackpot” (see Figure 21.11).

FIGURE 21.11 Noah-figure, Dr. Cole Hendron, ridiculed at the U.N.

Resolute and undeterred, this man-of-scientific-faith (cf. Heb. 11:7) posits that with "God's help and guidance" humanity could be saved via the construction of one or more interplanetary spaceships in eight months; a task the Yugoslavia delegate facetiously refers to in the film as "a twentieth-century Noah's ark." Without public support, Hendron raises privately donated capital and hurriedly builds *one* spaceship to transport survivalists to Zyra (see Figure 21.12).

FIGURE 21.12 The spaceship-ark under construction.

Meanwhile, massive geophysical forces from these fast-approaching interplanetary bodies trigger earthquakes, fires, avalanches, floods, and massive tidal waves that dramatically destroy New York City (see Figure 21.13). But when the money stalls for construction, Sydney Stanton (John Hoyt), an

unsympathetic wheelchair-bound industrialist (analogously, corrupt flesh; Gen. 6:12), finances completion of “this Noah’s ark,” not for “the salvation of a civilization,” but to selfishly delay his own death.

FIGURE 21.13 An inundated New York City.

Alternatively, Dr. Hendron’s daughter and assistant, Joyce (Barbara Rush), is shown to be an intelligent, beautiful, stylish scientist. Her sub-plot involves a love triangle between her, the bush pilot turned confidential courier David Randall (Richard Derr) (see Figure 21.14), and the romantically defeated but honorable Dr. Tony Drake (Peter Hansen). These three inner-circle members, youthful lottery-chosen heteronormative breeders, and the cute rescued boy, Mike (Rudy Lee), comprise the all-white Elect (analogously, Noah’s sons and daughters—Gen. 6:18). Via a ramp and side-door entrance, they board the spaceship-ark stocked with supplies, microfilmed books (including the Holy Bible), and breeding animals (loaded two by two and anesthetized). Afterwards, the unlucky left-behind workers stage a violent mutiny (cf. Gen. 6:13).

FIGURE 21.14 Joyce Hendron (scientist) and Dave Randall (pilot).

The pen-shaped spaceship-ark (with pew-and-pulpit-like interior) then launches skywards (cf. Gen. 7:17), leaving behind the ridiculing scientists, United Nations delegates, mutineers, as well as the now miraculously standing evil paraplegic Stanton, plus Dr. Hendron, due to his own self-sacrifice. Earth is destroyed, but the survivors successfully navigate a sea of space and safely land upon snowy Zyran mountains (analogously, Mount Ararat—Gen. 8:4). Below this mountainous range are sun-drenched, paradisiacal (Technicolor) fields which foreshadow humankind's fertile future. The stowed animals, alongside new-born puppies, are unloaded (two by two), and a heavenly choir sings as calligraphic, Scripture-esque verse book-ends the film with, "The first day on the new world had begun …" (cf. Gen. 8:16). Its depiction of the non-starring male and female survivors are nondescript, akin to the blandness of Noah's scriptural family.

The Bible: In the Beginning … (U.S./IT, dir. John Huston, 1966)

This extravagant American-Italian biblical epic showcases Scripture from Creation to Abraham's binding of Isaac (Gen. 1–22), including a comedic Noah narrative.[18] Real-world atheist director, John Huston, plays the narrator, God's voice, and the "just" animal-loving Noah (see Figure 21.15), "a simple peasant … an innocent protected by his belief and lack of guile … the child figure in the Bible. He's always a little bit absurd and delightful,"[19] especially with animated

talking, quick movements, and comical facial contortions.

FIGURE 21.15 An anxious, child-like Noah.

In the film, God identifies Noah's three (white, short-haired, bearded) sons as "Shem, Japheth and Ham" (contra Gen. 5:32), although Noah twice calls them (in biblical order), "Shem!" (Peter Heinze), "Ham!" (Angelo Boscariol), "Japheth!" (Eric Leutzinger). The son's wives (Anna Maria Orso, Gabriella Pallotta, and Rossana De Rocco, respectively), are unnamed, although they are collectively referred to as "sons" and "daughters" in association with Noah's sons (see Figure 21.16). Noah's unnamed timid "wife" (Pupella Maggio) is plain, plump, and productive, but simple-minded; the last feature Noah (lovingly?) abides.[20]

FIGURE 21.16 Noah's family with stereotypically fearful females.

The voice of God commands the "perfect" (white, semi-balding, white-bearded) Noah: "Make thee an ark of gopher wood [300 x 50 x 30 cubits]" (Gen. 6:14–15), which he does using leafy untreated trees while enduring public ridicule that is prominently led by female characters (see Figure 21.17). Ham (thickly bearded with red belt and distinctive, single-shouldered garment) queries: "Father, is it indeed God's voice thou hast heard?" Alongside his brothers, Ham sleeps soundly on-the-job, despite a (comical) hit on the head with a pitch bucket stuck to Noah's foot. He is also allocated handling "hay and grain," "the camels, the hares, the swine and the giraffes." Once on board the

ark, Ham again queries: “When will the rain cease?,” and mechanically claims: “The moon has no waxing or waning and the sun no rising or setting. We are without knowledge of time.”

FIGURE 21.17 wicked, women-led, ridiculers.

Alternatively, Shem (with darker-brown belt) is charged with handling “hay and grain” and “animals which divideth the hoof and cheweth the cud,” particularly the “red hart” (deer). On-board he asks: “When shall we stand again upon the Earth?,” and ponders: “But here when no light comes, we know neither the day nor the light”; “When the rains stop, still the water will cover the Earth”; “And where will the ark have carried us? In what strange land shall we be renewed?”

The smallest son, Japheth (with light-brown belt) is responsible for helping the still-coming animals “find their way” plus handling “the tigers, the lions, the cats of all kinds.” On-board he muses: “We cannot measure the time by sleep. For we lie down when we will. When we are rested, we wake,” “Neither shall we know the world as before,” “We shall be alone on the Earth.”

Conversely, the women in the family are tasked with filling oil lamps and “getting thy house aboard the ark in order,” including relocating potted fruit trees and milking the animals. Notably, however, no daughter has *any* philosophical thoughts. Their concerns, as their names, are unremarked, rendered absent. One notable exception being when Noah’s nervous wife comically queries feeding: “Milk? For beasts of prey?,” and later reveals her canny time-keeping record rooted in the animals’ biological rhythms.

Noah fills the ark with divinely selected, “good,” God-informed animals (two by two), led by his Piped Piper–style flute-playing (see Figure 21.18) whereupon “forty days and forty nights” (Gen. 7:12) of tumultuous rains follow (plus a goat birth). Noah’s test dove returns with an olive leaf, and Ham wants to make “a rudder and a sail” to “find land” (earning Noah’s rebuke), but eventually the (feces-free) ark beaches upon Mount Ararat and the animals are unloaded (two by two), ending with God’s covenant rainbow shining (Gen. 9:13).

FIGURE 21.18 Noah loading the ark with animals, two by two.

Like previous films on this biblical epic, women have lesser recognition, dynamic roles, or philosophical thoughts than men. They remain unnamed, are silent, and are simply tasked with assisting their husbands and father-in-law. The film especially treats Noah's wife as comic relief. While she automatically defends her husband against this onslaught of queries by their sons, she immediately and stereotypically contradicts herself, making her own query immediately thereafter. She is a simple-minded, if good-natured, wife to the true (male) hero of the film.

Noah's Ark (DE/U.S., dir. John Irvin, 1999)

This offensively unintelligent and irreverent Hallmark TV movie proudly embraces its onscreen claim of "poetic license" via numerous (unscriptural and banal) backstories.[21] Most notably, it introduces the hen-pecked Lot (F. Murray Abraham), the "best friend" of Noah (Jon Voight). The film portrays Noah himself as a righteous, cloth-dying businessman who resides with his friend, along with their families, in Sodom. This mashup of the Flood and Sodom and Gomorrah narratives serves as the foundation for what follows: "The Lord [sic] God, Creator of Heaven and Earth," sickened by humankind's wickedness, decides to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah; but not before God's "chosen one," Noah, evacuates with his family, divinely prompted by an unscriptural lava flow (see Figure 21.19). Escaping the comet-led destruction, Noah's whiny wife, Naamah (Mary Steenburgen), casts dispersion upon future biblical scribes for undoubtedly ignoring their participation in this catastrophe. Following Noah's advice, Lot also escapes destruction. As a momento of this horrific event, Lot keeps his shrewish wife's detached finger (turned-to-salt when she did not resist looking upon the divine destruction) proudly hanging around his neck (cf. Gen. 19:26).

FIGURE 21.19 Noah and lava flow.

The film then jumps to ten years later. Noah's three boisterous sons, Shem (Mark Bazeley), Ham, "the eldest" (Alexis Denisof), and Japheth, the "dreamer" (Jonathan Cake, see Figure 21.20), are shown courting three maidens.[22] They are named, Miriam (Sonya Walger), Ruth (Sydney Tamiia Poitier), and Esther (Emily Mortimer). These names are, of course, unscriptural, but biblically based (see Figure 21.21).

FIGURE 21.20 Noah, Ham, Shem, Japheth, and Naamah.

Because of drought and crop failures, the black (and "very hard to find") virgin, Ruth, is selected for sacrifice to the pagan god, Molé, (ironically) to get "the life-giving waters of heaven." Instead, she is heroically rescued by Ham, his

brothers, and God, whose lightning bolts render the three officiating pagan priests dumb, blind, and deaf (Three-Wise-Monkeys style). Post-rescue, the bearded, amorous Ham and the now knife-wielding proto-feminist Ruth playfully ponder the dangers of virginity and its cure, while the bearded (cravat-wearing) Shem and girlfriend Miriam question miracles, freewill, and love. Promptly following this discourse, the beardless (leather necklace-wearing) Japheth philosophically ponders: “Did God create animals or people first, and why isn’t the sun out at night when we need it most?” His girlfriend Esther responds (with strong sexual undertone), “If we had fur like the animals, we wouldn’t have to wear clothes, would we?,” with their passions promptly diverted by “What are colds for?”

FIGURE 21.21 Miriam, Ruth, and Esther.

Following this sub-plot, the wise-cracking (echo-chambered) voice of God (Jon Voight) commands Noah to build a “300 cubits long,” “gopher wood” ark. While he is building the ark, Noah’s mocking neighbors, led by Esther’s troublemaking father, behave like British soccer hooligans. Further, when an inebriated Noah complains about “only four of us” and unable to hire help, God provides neatly stacked, precision-cut lumber, with coded symbols for easy ark assembly (see Figure 21.22). During his building project, Noah temporarily reunites with a now-murderous Lot, the latter of whom quickly departs.

Eventually, a sleep-walking Noah awakens before a miraculously completed ark (minus rudder), whereupon an awe-less God reveals the plan to “drown the world in my tears.” The God-gathered animals arrive (along with a pre-flood rainbow!) and are loaded (two by two). God then provides animal feed (plus shovels for a feces-full ark) and stops rioting neighbors with torrential rains, while Noah’s sons belatedly retrieve their girlfriends. This part of the film is

notable because it necessitates Ruth being punched unconscious by Ham for *not* abandoning her selfless mother. Secured and floating safely, Naamah attempts the removal of some "little nasties," such as tarantulas, giant cockroaches, mosquitoes, and tapeworms, which Noah prevents, and at night he locks up the three young girls for their sexual safety.

FIGURE 21.22 God-provided ark lumber.

Incredulously (contra Gen. 7:21, 23), a jolly peddler (James Coburn) approaches the ark in a pedal-propelled boat-cart selling "pots, pans, sharp knives, dresses … [and] Marigold's wonder mixture," a "smooth" "medicinal" drink, plus other luxury items that the money-less Noah trades for with the provisions in the ark. The peddler then departs back into the vast unknown sea! Another extrabiblical expansion focuses on the increasingly amorous partners, who are thwarted by protective gorillas and God/Noah's vigorously enforced no-sex/procreation rule; a situation which displeases Naamah but titillates the others during Noah's family sex-talk. Equally incredulous, a small pirate flotilla (led by a back-sliding and eye-patched Lot) attacks the floating ark. Noah's family vigorously defend their ship, the girls using yesterday's bread roles, fry pan, basket, broom, and Ruth's ax! After the struggle, God promptly drowns the retreating transgressors via a giant tornado waterspout and temporarily abandons Noah's family to "carefully" (but belatedly) ponder their fate.

During the divine respite, the family suffers a series of unexplained psychological delusions and rebellion. Most notably, Ham fights Noah over a rudder and ark control, Japheth and Esther promenade on stilts fantasizing social superiority, Shem converses with a human-faced grapefruit in a Punch-and-Judy ventriloquist fashion, and an Ophelia-esque Naamah and a faith-fading Noah both require physical restraint. When they recover, God decides to destroy the

rest of humanity, but Noah's whistling and comical dancing changes God's mind whereupon a dove-with-branch is released revealing dry land, a rainbow appears, the ark beaches, and the animals discharge, two by two. "Captain" Noah marries the partners and allows them early release for their future lives. Finally, God regrets going "too far" and being "wrong."

In this film, women are often stereotyped as fashion-focused, romantically frustrated, homebodies. Although they are sometimes depicted as proto-warriors who challenge men, men are stereotyped as overgrown boys who seek adventure. It is worth noting that this film provides names to the three main female characters. Yet the film also portrays violence against women. Lot's wife is dismembered upon her death and Ruth experiences domestic abuse from Ham. Further, the film portrays each woman as a sexual object, Noah locks the women up in the ark, and the banter between Noah's sons and daughters-in-law are filled with sexual undertones. In sum, Noah's Ark (1999) does not provide a liberating interpretation of gender dynamics and neither gender is depicted as particularly pious or responsible.

NORTHFORK (U.S., DIR. MICHAEL POLISH, 2003)

FIGURE 21.23 Flood waters with ark-shaped coffin.

This confusing, semi-surreal film about loss is based upon the flooded 1955 community of Northfork, Montana (1776–1955).[23] It opens with an ark-like coffin emerging from vast watery depths (see Figure 21.23). Shortly thereafter a Godlike voiceover from Bible-toting Father Harlan (Nick Nolte) quotes strategically tweaked scripture: "Then the water shall become a flood, and destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud, and I will look upon it, and I will remember, the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature, of all flesh that is upon the earth" (cf. Gen. 9:15–16). Just a few diehard Northforkians resist relocation, notably its Noah-figure, a polygamist religious

zealot eponymously named Mr. Stalling (Marshall Bell) and two, unnamed, Mrs. Stallings (Saralyn Sebern; Ginny Watts) (see Figure 21.24).

FIGURE 21.24 Mr. Stalling, his two wives, and two evacuation agents.

Instead, this family builds a propped-up boat with house atop that looks like a small Noah's ark (see Figure 21.25). This unexpected bible-esque scene prompts evacuation agent Willis O'Brien (Mark Polish) to quip to Walter O'Brien (James Woods), his father and fellow government agent: "You suppose he's got two of everything in there?" (cf. Gen. 6:19). Once inside, via a ramp front door and sitting before a boat-shaped table, Walter remarks: "It appears to me that you folks are preparing for a flood in biblical proportions," to which Mr. Stalling retorts: "You got that right son. A flood is gonna wipe through this place, cleansing the soil of all sin. … This is God's land, and by God, we ain't movin' until we get that sign from above."

FIGURE 21.25 Mr. Stalling's ark.

Walter promptly recounts a teaching tale (visually re-enacted): "One day, a town on the plains, let's say Northfork, was hit by a catastrophic flood, similar to the days of Noah, and your husband and yourselves were standing up there on the roof waiting to be rescued." Therein the Stallings rebuff two rescue boats

while waiting “for a sign from God” which (supposedly) never came, but as God responds (via Willis): “I sent you two boats to save your lives. What more of a sign did you three want?”

The Noachian theme is further reinforced by the Stallings’s two-by-two themed interior decorations, notably, two chirping caged canaries, two dear heads, two stuffed birds, two displayed fish, plus multiple pairings of wall-mounted family photographs (see Figure 21.26). Indeed, Walter’s story refers to two boats, visually reinforced by two pairs of two fingers, whilst Mr. Stalling initially greets them with: “Now all I need is a pair of sinners like yourselves to mount up there.” Later, Walter surprisingly observes: “Pair of wives?” and Willis cheekily retorts: “At least they’re not mounted.”

FIGURE 21.26 Multiple two-by-two pairings.

The film presents these neo-nameless domestic women as docile, subservient, and simple. They ultimately succumb to the agent’s evacuation arguments and depart their ark-home, unlike Mr. Stalling who defiantly remains, holding tight onto the rudder-wheel of his ark. The film ends with an expansive flood scene to bookend its textual and subtextual storytelling. The film thus eschews Noah’s sons and their wives to concentrate upon ark imagery and a two-by-two thematic.

Evan Almighty (U.S., dir. Tom Shadyac, 2007)

This modern-day fantasy film humorously re-enacts the biblical flood utilizing Buffalo news anchor turned U.S. congressman, Evan Baxter (Steve Carell), a self-identified Noah analogue.[24] His bedside prayer and “Change the World!”

campaign slogan prompts “G”/God Almighty (Morgan Freeman), a white-clothed, humorous black male to appear and commission Evan to build a “gopher wood” ark (Gen. 6:14),[25] needed by “September 22, midday.” Unlike the biblical Noah, a suspicious Evan demands proof, so God repeatedly appears as various characters, including a car passenger, motorcycle cop, street pedestrian, fellow car driver, fellow congressman, attending doctor, and TV weatherman.

Furthermore, Evan is also stalked by numerous animal pairings (e.g., doves, cats, dogs, squirrels, hawks, deer, chipmunks, skunks, multiple other birds, buffalos, sheep, spiders, snakes, donkeys, horses, cougars, foxes, ducks, bears, goats, pigs, cows, wolves) and he miraculously experiences multiple manifestations of God’s ark-building Scripture, “Genesis 6:14” (e.g., via alarm clock display, carpentry toolbox address, lumber delivery address, lumber receipt number, a protester placard on TV, Holy Bible verse, God’s vocal instruction, office phone extension number, baby’s weight, congressional number plates, the URL: <Genesis614.com>, see Figure 21.27).

FIGURE 21.27 Online scriptural guidance about Noah.

Evan reluctantly accepts God’s commission, and being both born-again and biblified, he commences ark construction near his new home at Prestige Crest, even as he progressively transforms into a white-haired, Noah-figure, with the media mocking him with the moniker, “New York’s Noah.” His loving wife Joan (Lauren Graham) and three young sons, Dylan (Johnny Simmons), Jordan (Graham Phillips), and Ryan (Jimmy Bennett) are initially nonplussed, but following his painfully revealed confession, they leave him fearing a midlife crisis. Being young boys, his sons had no wives (or girlfriends), unlike their biblical correlates (Gen. 7:13).

Later, at a roadside grill, God appears to Joan as a friendly waiter wearing an “Al Mighty” name tag (see Figure 21.28) and inspires her to return home

following his unscriptural explanation of Noah's narrative: "They think it's about God's wrath and anger" but "it's a love story about believing in each other. You know, the animals showed up in pairs. They stood by each other, side by side, just like Noah and his family. Everybody entered the ark side by side." As God previously told Evan: "Whatever I do, I do because I love you" (cf. 1 John 4:7–8), all "6,717,323,711" of his children. Furthermore, "ARK" actually means "**A**cts of **R**andom **K**indness," which dramatically contrasts with traditional theological concerns with wickedness, disappointment, and corrective destruction.

FIGURE 21.28 An incognito God engaging Joan.

Joan and her three boisterous boys return home and help Evan with his holy task (see Figure 21:29) using animal assistance, tools and materials supplied by "Alpha and Omega hardware" (cf. Rev. 22.13), plus God's newest sacred text, *Ark Building for Dummies*.

FIGURE 21.29 "New York's Noah" with awe-filled family.

Once completed, the impressively calm waiting animals (see Figure 21.30) are slowly loaded (two by two), while the public continues mocking Evan, which quickly turns into moaning when the local "Long Lake Reservoir" dam ruptures and its raging waters start destroying Prestige Crest. Unlike Holy Writ, Evan's naysayers avoid immanent death by quickly boarding the ark and riding the raging waters until it beaches itself upon Capitol Hill (analogously, Mount Ararat—Gen. 8:4), with rainbow shining overhead (cf. Gen. 9:13).

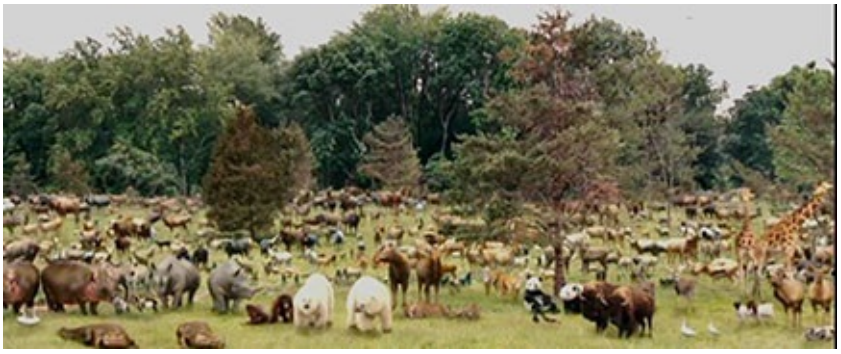

FIGURE 21.30 The impressive, calmly waiting menagerie.

The film ends with a back-to-normal Evan, a happy family enjoying uncluttered nature, an iconic dove-with-branch, and a newly minted eleventh commandment from God, his cosmic buddy, namely: "Thou shalt do the dance" (a silly rhythmic movement). Interestingly, Ryan is the outspoken youngest son (analogously Ham, Noah's "younger son"—Gen. 9:24), who defends Buster-the-dog for twice interrogating Evan's crotch, and who blurts out an embarrassing penis fact (analogously, Ham sexually dishonoring Noah—Gen. 9:24). Thereafter, Noah's family eschew divine consultations, with Joan's primary function still being love and family support (as God had previously engineered), while Evan's sassy executive assistant, Rita (Wanda Sykes), could be viewed subtextually as a Noachian daughter-in-law in addition to her comic foil function.

Noah (U.S., dir. Darren Aronofsky, 2014)

This bizarre biblical blockbuster creatively fuses Holy Writ, the books of Enoch and Jubilees, rabbinic commentaries, and dystopian Aronofsky aesthetics to create a modern-day midrash that tries to harmonize the biblical seven days of Creation (Gen. 1:1–2:3) with science.[26] Its controversial, non-canonical embellishments, which turned the movie from exegesis to eisegesis, included Creation-as-evolution, the Edenic serpent's skin as a Noah-family heirloom, *one* Edenic seed responsible for *instantaneous* flower-growing, forest-sprouting, and water-swelling, and the existence of fallen angels-turned-lumbering-six-armed, Golem-like rock-monsters called "Watchers" (see Figure 21.31). Furthermore, it showcases anesthetized ark animals (via soporific smoke), some of which are killed and others eaten by wickedness personified, the flood stowaway, "king" Tubal-cain (Ray Winstone), the existence of a mini ark escape boat that is

subsequently burned, and ark-building that took ten years *with* multiple Watcher assistance (and their impressive tree-stripping abilities)! Overall, the film is a massively divergent antediluvian reimagining, *not* a scriptural retelling, that ultimately clouds the biblical facts to engineer another Hollywood heresy.

FIGURE 21.31 The monstrous golem-like Watchers.

Its bearded, short-haired, Noah (Russell Crowe), is no "preacher of righteousness" (2 Pet. 2:5), but instead is an aggressive, murderous, and depressed vegetarian (Gen. 1:29), who suffers disturbing water visions, and communes silently with "The Creator." His family is comprised of a loving, hard-working, but sometimes scared wife, Naameh (Jennifer Connelly) who tries to bypass Noah's negativity to ensure her sons' happiness, but reluctantly accepts his violent authority. Their three sons are Shem (Douglas Booth), a bearded, long-haired, "eldest" son, Ham (Logan Lerman), a clean-shaven, short-haired, troubled teenager, and Japheth (Leo McHugh Carroll), a reddish-haired, pre-pubertal youngest son (contra Gen. 9:24) (see Figure 21.32 and 21.33).

FIGURE 21.32 Ham, Noah, Japheth, and Naameh.

Shem is intimately involved with Noah's unscriptural adopted daughter, Ila

(Emma Watson),[27] previously barren but who miraculously bore Shem twin girls on-board the ark due to grandfather Methuselah's (Anthony Hopkins) blessing.[28] Ham is sexually frustrated because he "doesn't have anyone," and due to Noah's enforced celibacy, he ultimately ends up with *no* wife before, during, or after the flood (violating Gen. 7:13; 8:16, 18). Finally, baby brother Japheth (Leo McHugh Carroll) displays innocence and kindness but "lives only to please," and is destined to be "the last man" due to Noah's extinction edict.

FIGURE 21.33 The rain-drenched Ila and Shem.

The film enacts an unscriptural sub-plot of Ham almost recruiting a wife (see Figure 21.34), the frightened refugee Na'el (Madison Davenport), who is unexpectedly trapped and then callously abandoned to death by Noah. This perceived betrayal infuriates Ham who subsequently conspires with flood stowaway and Noah's nasty nemesis, "Tubal-cain" (cf. Gen. 4:22), to murder Noah. Shem unexpectedly and unsuccessfully attacks Noah, but at the last minute Ham changes his mind and stabs Tubal-cain instead (who then gifts him the Edenic snake-skin, applauds his murderous manliness, and promptly dies!). Later, the maddened Noah threatens to kill Ila's newly born twin daughters, he thwarts Shem and Ila's mutinous escape attempt, whereupon the distressed Naameh and Ila painfully accept the twins' deaths. This decision is then reversed by the struggling God-like Noah, who lovingly relents in a mercy-amidst-judgment fashion.

FIGURE 21.34 Ham's almost wife, Na'el.

Once the ark beaches (broken-in-two-looking like a wooden Stonehenge), the alienated Ham returns the Edenic snake-skin trophy to a drunken, nude Noah, after Shem and Japheth cover his nakedness (cf. Gen. 9:20–24). Ham then walks off into the wide wilderness, worried and wife-less, while Noah provides a ritualized birthright blessing to his family, particularly the (future procreating) granddaughters, followed by a highly stylized rainbow as The Creator's divine benediction-cum-post-flood-afterthought. Aronofsky's disaster-to-family film offers the most detailed female backstories and character enhancements to date, however outrageously imagined. Nevertheless, it still left one wondering what other women were available to fulfill God's command: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (Gen. 9:1) beyond Naameh, Ila, and her two baby girls with potentially disturbing incestuous implications.

CONCLUSION

Each film, made between 1928 and 2014, emphasizes different scriptural quantum, but the basic gender portrayals do not progress very much beyond traditional stereotypes of Noah's supremacy, filial submissiveness, and the male figures remaining central characters and in control. Indeed, Noah's family only benefits because of *his* worthiness (Gen. 6:8–9; 7:1) and not because of their intrinsic merits or worldly deeds. Women fare much worse because of their secondary status *despite* their primary function as humanity's new mothers (recoded as male fertility, Gen. 9:19). Furthermore, the hero stories are essentially male spectacles highlighting physicality, bravery, perseverance, and technical virtuosity in constructing the ark—the ultimate home building project. Alternatively feminine power is muted and presented primarily as emotionality

which is either positive (support, love, nurturance) or negative (manipulation, mockery, ridicule). In short, our Western cultural assumptions are deeply androcentric which we automatically imbibe unawares. Where are the serious Noachian narratives from the point of view of Noah's wife, daughters-in-law, or even his sons?

When filmmakers create imaginative scriptural extrapolations, it frequently revolves around rebelliousness, madness, or heterosexual titillation, but ignores glaring biblical omissions. Notably, Noah being aged "five hundred years" (Gen. 5:32) when he begets his three sons, and "six hundred years" (Gen. 7:6) when the flooding starts. There are no biblical accounts of Noah being mocked, let alone mercilessly (cf. Matt. 24:38–39), which is prominent within many ark films, saying more about humanity than God. Neither are there many filmic renditions of God directly sealing them inside the ark (Gen. 7:16) nor do any of the films emphasize that Noah loaded "every clean beast" and "fowls … of the air by sevens" (Gen. 7:2–3), one of each group eventually becoming "burnt offerings" (Gen. 8:20). And God does not command Noah to leave the ark (Gen. 8:15–16) or that eating blood was prohibited (Gen. 9:4).

Nevertheless, Noachian cinema is important in our increasingly secularized, post-Christian, post-print world for highlighting nature's awesome power, faithfully obeying God (however irksome), and for exploring Scripture's appropriation for contemporary sociocultural purposes, such as environmentalism. Even "bad" films offer good pedagogic opportunities for *via negativa*–style biblical exegesis to stimulate one's religious understanding. Overall, the archetypal flood story will forever entrance storytellers; only the artistic permutations will alter per reimagining. Additional research into the religion-and-film field is warmly recommended, eagerly awaited, and critically needed for future pedagogic deployment.

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[12] The addition of "[sic]" indicates exclusive language for God or humankind.

[13] Indeed, many film extras were badly injured with at least one fatality, which was suppressed by Warner Bros—see Anthony Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns: A History of Extras, Bit Players, and Stand-Ins*

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[20] For instance, she wants home roof repairs to be completed before abandoning it to the forthcoming rains, and she mistakes human wailing for atmospheric wind.

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[27] Skylar Burke, Gavin Casalegno, Nolan Gross, and an unnamed infant play the younger versions of Ila, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, respectively.

[28] Methuselah also possesses sleep-inducing abilities, a magical flaming sword, and elects to die via suicide during the flood.

CHAPTER 22

MEDIATING DINAH'S STORY IN FILM

RHONDA BURNETTE-BLETSCH

In recent years, biblical scholars have examined the translation of biblical texts into other media as an appropriate and valuable area of research. At the forefront of this emerging interdisciplinary approach is the critical investigation of the Bible in popular media, such as film and television.[1] As the dominant narrative mode in contemporary culture, film has become a powerful vehicle for the dissemination and interpretation of biblical traditions, often with a mass-market reach that far exceeds religious institutions or the academy. Since these audio-visual translations of biblical texts might challenge or reinforce androcentric and misogynistic interpretative traditions associated with biblical texts, they present fresh material for feminist scholarship.

Moreover, biblical films provide ample evidence of the feminist claim that social location impacts hermeneutics. In the varied ways they visualize and interpret biblical stories, films clearly reflect the circumstances of their production, as well as particular directorial styles and genre conventions. Comparing two or more films based on the same text but derived from different time periods and/or different cultures provides an eloquent testimony to the active role played by socially located readers in the production of meaning. Cinematic readings of a text are clearly shaped by the ideological framework brought to bear on that text by real flesh-and-blood readers. Likewise, feminist interpreters of the Bible, recognizing that readers do not transcend their own historical and cultural circumstances to attain a value-neutral stance from which to read texts, advocate self-consciously ideological scholarship that does not

conceal a scholar's social and political commitments behind a veil of feigned academic objectivity.[2]

Dispensing with the fallacy that there is only one "correct" reading of a text opens up space for discussions of ethics in biblical interpretation. Feminist scholarship invites readers of the Bible to consider the ethical consequences of their readings as they intersect with contemporary concerns, especially those of groups that have traditionally been socially marginalized and disempowered. Misogynistic or imperialistic readings, for example, should be considered unethical because they reinforce and legitimate oppressive power structures. Where the biblical text itself permits no other kind of reading, the text's misogynistic and imperialistic ideologies should be recognized and critiqued rather than minimized or defended by scholarly apologetics.[3]

This essay analyzes two drastically different cinematic adaptations of the story of Dinah found in Genesis 34: the Malian film, *La Genèse* (dir. Cheick Oumar Sissoko, 1999), and the American miniseries, *The Red Tent* (dir. Roger Young, 2014). The Dinah story occasions notorious disputes among biblical scholars who apply to the interpretive task very different approaches and ideological commitments. Feminist scholars typically recognize Genesis 34 as a text of terror wherein Dinah is brutalized, silenced, and marginalized. Several feminist interpreters attempt to recover her voice and reread the narrative by centralizing her experience. Other readers utilize interpretive strategies that minimize or defend the sexual violence in this text and leave its patriarchal ideology unchallenged.

In this chapter, I first analyze Sissoko and Young's Dinah films as distinct cinematic interpretations of the biblical text. I emphasize that the context of interpretation impacts each retelling of the biblical story that either depicts or minimizes the violence inherent in Genesis 34. Second, I locate these films within the larger exegetical tradition associated with Genesis 34. While both films depart from the biblical text by giving Dinah voice and agency, I argue that they nonetheless follow interpretive trajectories that undergird misogynistic myths constitutive of rape culture and the oppression of women.

La Genèse—She Asked for It, or Dinah Goes to Africa

Cheick Oumar Sissoko uses the story of Dinah and other assorted tales from the

book of Genesis to illuminate conflicts, tribalism, and violence in postcolonial Africa and to offer a hopeful vision of moving beyond fratricide to fraternity.[4] *La Genèse* thoroughly Africanizes the biblical story in ways that might seem strange to Western audiences accustomed to very different modes of storytelling. Sissoko draws on local Malian artists to create a native cinematic aesthetic especially noticeable in the set designs and costumes. Disregarding historical realism and biblical chronology, he transports the story of Dinah's family to rural Mali where he selects and arranges episodes from Genesis to suit his larger purpose of espousing pan-African reconciliation and unity. The film is tellingly dedicated to all the victims of fratricidal conflicts and those who make peace. Thus, *La Genèse* cleverly highjacks Genesis, a colonial text, and transforms it into a source of post-colonial liberation for contemporary Africa.[5]

The film begins *in media res* as text, superimposed on a black screen, introduces the patriarchs of three clans: Hamor's settled villagers, Jacob's semi-nomadic herdsmen, and Esau's nomadic hunters. Clan affiliation is demarcated by costume and setting. Hamor's gold-clad villagers occupy multi-story brick structures. Stick and cloth huts indicate the semi-mobility of Jacob's blue-robed clan, while Esau's hunters wear skins and roam the barren landscape around Mount Hombori Tondo. Each of these clans represent one of the three major uses of land in sub-Saharan Africa, and the film explores social relations among them.[6] These different modes of production, which are mentioned only briefly in Genesis (cf. 25:27–28; 33:18–19), are the main focus of Sissoko's film as an allegory of African experience. Thus, group identity, rather than sexual assault, becomes the primary focus of the story in this retelling.

Trouble already besets tribal relations as Esau seeks vengeance against Jacob (Gen. 27:41) who is mourning his (presumed dead) son, Joseph (Genesis 37). Early scenes cut back and forth between Jacob sequestered in the dark confines of his hut and Esau leading his hunters across open country. Both clans are marked by notable elements of androcentricism. Extending his arms heavenward, Esau addresses the Creator in a prayer recalling the creation of man, woman, and brothers in a context of scarce resources ("drought and thirst"). While not his main concern, Esau describes woman as "unquenchable thirst," as if to suggest either that women themselves are never satisfied or that they inspire an unquenchable thirst among men. Esau's primary focus, however, is on the brothers who must compete for scarce resources. Sisters are not mentioned. In Jacob's camp, Dinah stands within a circle of huts washing the bloody garment of Joseph. Meanwhile Leah and Jacob argue over whether he should continue mourning. Jacob angrily denies his paternity of Leah's sons,

chases Dinah away with a stick, and retrieves the garment.

The next scene transitions to Genesis 34 in which Sissoko illustrates and focalizes the theme of fratricidal strife. Rather than "going out" to see the daughters of the land, Dinah is minding goats in the vicinity of two boys and Shechem, who is tilling a nearby field. She flirts with Shechem, and the boys tease him about her attention. Shechem then chases her down, tosses the screaming young woman over his shoulder, and runs away with her. "Has he finally done it?" the boys ask one another excitedly.[7] Dinah's initiation of her interaction with Shechem and the question of the two boys suggest that she has flirted with him previously. Yet her consent is far from clear. Indeed, her screaming would strongly suggest that she does *not* consent to her treatment by Shechem. Nevertheless, characters throughout the film will repeatedly accuse Dinah of having intentionally seduced him, unfortunately reinforcing the myth that victims of sexual violence must be "asking for it."

FIGURE 22.1 A woman of Hamor's clan displays a bloody sheet proving Dinah's virginity. *La Genèse* (1999).

The rape occurs off screen while gold-clad villagers sit outside Shechem's house. One man, peering between the stones of the house, tells the crowd: "It's Dinah, Jacob's daughter." Another calls her a whore and insists that her family lacks honor because of their semi-nomadic lifestyle. A woman emerges from the house and holds up a bloody sheet as a sign of Dinah's lost virginity, and the crowd celebrates (Figure 22.1). Are they celebrating an abduction marriage, the masculine vigor of Shechem, or an act of violence against a rival clan? The woman's song compares Shechem to a "mighty bull" who services Dinah in a way that Jacob's "billy-goats" cannot. "The lion made Jacob's bitches bleed," she taunts but runs away when Shechem emerges shirtless from the house while refastening his pants.

Hamor clearly disapproves of his son's actions, but not for reasons of

immorality. After glowering silently at Shechem, he joins Dinah in the house where she sits huddled and crying. He rebukes her for “seducing” his princely son rather than one of her own people, and she answers in proverbs that compare Shechem to a donkey. In response, he strikes her and calls her insolent. The camera lingers a moment on Dinah after Hamor leaves the house, showing a solemn expression and a tear on her cheek. She does not act like a woman basking in the afterglow of a welcomed sexual encounter (Figure 22.2).

FIGURE 22.2 Dinah’s decided lack of a post-coital glow. *La Genèse* (1999).

At Shechem’s request, Hamor negotiates a marriage agreement between the clans. As they walk to Jacob’s camp, a voiceover summarizes that Shechem “abducted Dinah, Jacob’s daughter. He lay with her and raped her, but then he fell in love with her with all his heart and all his soul, and he consoled her.” The film follows interpretive traditions that identify Shechem’s action as rape followed by an emotional reversal to love. Three verbs describe his action as escalating in violence (abduct, lay with, rape). Yet, the film disturbingly romanticizes rape by asking viewers to accept that a rapist might fall in love with his victim.

Jacob does not wait for his sons to return from the fields, but greets his cousin, Hamor, and expresses contempt for Dinah in comparison to his favored child, Joseph. It is Leah who vocally objects to the proposed marriage, vowing “the gazelle’s milk will not be mixed with the hyena’s droppings!” Departing from Genesis, Shechem apologizes to Jacob and his sons before offering whatever they ask of him as a bride price. Judah refuses first, citing the curse of Canaan (Gen. 9:25–27), then Reuben objects to the idea of their sister marrying an uncircumcised man. It is Jacob who proposes the solution that the villagers be circumcised so that they might intermarry and become one people. The brothers pretend to endorse this proposal while secretly plotting a massacre.

A lengthy and humorous circumcision scene follows, during which Shechem

gazes love-struck at Dinah as she stands at a window. An old woman, whom Shechem calls a witch, curses Dinah and taunts the men as they anxiously wait their turn. Although Dinah laughs and watches Shechem, it is still difficult to tell how she feels about him. Is she laughing at his suffering, or does the film strain credulity and good taste by implying that she has developed tender feelings for her rapist? Later scenes suggest the latter as Dinah hovers anxiously around the newly circumcised Shechem and cries out his name when he is struck by her brother's spear.

The village massacre, where Dinah's brothers kill the men who are weakened by circumcision, is shot in such a way to evoke memories of the Rwandan genocide and similar atrocities of the late twentieth century. Darkness obscures much of the violence and the grisliness of the scene is not enhanced by blood or special effects. Further, the handheld camera and lack of extra-diegetic music give the sequence a documentary feel. The main focus of the attack is wiping out Hamor's lineage by killing all of the men. The most emotionally poignant moment is the murder of a crying infant. Still, the vigilant viewer might also notice the implied rape of two village women (cf. Gen. 34:29), one of whom is dragged into a house while the other is forced to the ground beneath a blue-robed Jacobite (Figures 22.3 and 22.4).[8] Unlike Genesis, Hamor survives the massacre by hiding beneath the dress of a woman.

FIGURE 22.3 AND 22.4 Caption for both images: Shechemite woman are raped during the massacre. *La Genèse* (1999).

Jacob objects to his sons' actions, but not for the reasons stated in Genesis (34:30). He commiserates with Hamor as one grieving father to another and demonstrates his good faith by returning Dinah, whom he calls the "wife of Shechem," to her father-in-law. Dinah, the widowed bride, seems to exist separate from any of the clans. She wears white robes from the moment of her rape, perhaps to suggest that her clan status has become ambiguous. After the

massacre, she continues to haunt the film, behaves peculiarly, and is dismissed as a madwoman by her kin. One wonders whether Dinah's odd behavior is a result of the witch's curse: "My devils will devour you." Alternatively, it may allude to a tribal belief in some sub-Saharan African countries that widows are likely to be cursed and haunted by the spirits of their deceased husbands.[9]

Hamor and Shechem agree to call a meeting of the nations to combat the wickedness of the world. The scene reinforces Sissoko's pan-Africa message. The meeting, considerably slowing the pace of the story, provides an occasion for retelling more Genesis episodes via theater and flashback.[10] Jacob's sons blame the violence on the "thirst" that the men of Hamor's clan have for "our women" (recalling the language of Esau's cosmogony). Storytellers then highlight Judah's hypocrisy by revealing his own marriage to a Canaanite woman and sexual encounter with his Canaanite daughter-in-law, Tamar (Genesis 38). Despite his objection to intermarriage between his sister and Shechem, he himself has intermarried and reproduced with women of Hamor's tribe. Divisions between the clans are not as clear-cut as they might seem.

As Jacob retells the story of Rebekah and Isaac's betrothal (Genesis 24), Esau interrupts him and fighting breaks out between their families.[11] The argument continues until the film ventures into the supernatural realm, as indicated by a stylistic turn toward formalism. Jacob encounters a band of white-clad child angels who, along with Dinah, encircle him and change his name to Israel (Gen. 32:22–32). Jacob collapses and, when his sons discover him the next morning, Esau and Dinah sit nearby. Both play a central role in the grand finale, being mysteriously aware that Joseph is alive and well, living as a prince in Egypt. The film ends with Jacob affirming his family bond with Esau and sending his sons to Egypt to reconcile with their brother. In the final scene, the three patriarchs and Dinah stand together watching Jacob's sons walk off into the horizon, as voiceover narration describes the pending reconciliation with Joseph. Rather than ending with the exodus narrative, Sissoko leaves his characters in Africa having transcended their conflicts. Fratricide has given way to fraternity.

Susanne Scholz has rightly pointed out the film's androcentricism.[12] Most female characters are regulated to the background, including the Hivite women taken as spoils of war (Gen. 34:29). While Dinah appears more prominently, she exists in the film to serve as a source of conflict between male characters. Jacob can think of nothing but Joseph, and her brothers value only their own honor. They repeatedly dismiss their sister and physically push her to the ground. The film is not interested in Dinah but in the relations among male characters. Everyone, from Hamor's villagers to her own mother, calls Dinah a whore or a

bitch and imply that she invited Shechem's attentions. Sissoko never explicitly refutes this accusation despite the fact that Dinah's and Shechem's sexual encounter is not depicted as consensual. The incredulous suggestion that a victim of sexual violence might fall in love with her rapist, and he with her, further encourages viewers to blame the victim and to downplay the seriousness of rape. Overall, the film suggests that Dinah is to blame for Shechem's actions. While Sissoko's film is a remarkable repurposing of Genesis 34 for postcolonial liberation, it ultimately fails to be a liberating text for at least half of Africa's postcolonial population.

The Red Tent—All Women Want It, or Dinah Visits the Lifetime Network

The Lifetime miniseries, *The Red Tent* (dir. Roger Young, 2014), provides a very different take on Dinah's story than *La Genèse*. Young's miniseries, an adaptation of the bestselling novel by Anita Diamant,[13] was crafted for a predominantly female U.S.-American audience aged 18–54. Like Diamant's novel, the film retells and imaginatively expands portions of Genesis 29–34 and 47–50, narrated from Dinah's perspective. Many reviewers lauded the book for inviting women to "see themselves as central to the story, not as marginal two-bit players in a story about men."[14] Likewise, the film also placed female characters and women's concerns at the center of the narrative by focusing on Leah and Rachel rather than on Jacob. Dinah, voiceless and mostly passive in the biblical text, speaks and enjoys agency. Yet, what kind of voice does she have and how does Genesis 34 translate to the Lifetime Network?

The miniseries begins with a voiceover by an adult Dinah, as a crane shot provides a sweeping overhead view of the Hebrew camp. Most visually prominent is the eponymous red tent in which women gather during times of ritual uncleanness (menstruation and childbirth), This site serves as a refuge from men, where women bond and worship goddesses in a lush spa-like setting (Figure 22.5). Dinah introduces her story as a forgotten tale, and claims it was distorted and ignored by a sacred text that focuses on the stories of men. The tales of women, traditionally passed along from one generation to the next in the red tent, have been lost because "the chain between mother and daughter was broken" when Yahwism supplanted goddess worship. The film thus positions itself as a reclamation of one of these lost tales and a lament for women-friendly

paganism.[15]

FIGURE 22.5 The luxurious interior of the red tent, a woman's space. *The Red Tent* (2014).

Whereas the Genesis narrative focuses on the patriarchs, Dinah begins her story with her four mothers, Rachel, Leah, Bilhah, and Zilpah. Vivid colors are consistently associated with the film's key women: Dinah (green), Leah (blue), and Rachel (red). This coloration also aids viewers as these characters transition from child/teen to adult actors. Then again, Bilhah and Zilpah are identified as half-sisters of Rachel and Leah, are born to Laban by a slave woman (cf. *Gen. Rab*. 74:13), and are not consistently marked in this way and are therefore virtually interchangeable in the storyline.[16] They gradually disappear from the narrative altogether with their ultimate fates remaining unremarked, in contrast to those of their sisters. Their marginalization, along with their slightly darker complexions and kinkier hair, contribute to the film's problematic racial politics. Almost all of the positive main characters are fair-skinned Caucasians, whereas supporting characters and villains, such as Simeon and Levi, are swarthy Middle Easterners regardless of parentage.[17] This racist depiction sets *The Red Tent* securely alongside other biblical films that marginalize, villainize, or ignore non-white characters. The story reclaimed in the film is thus a racist depiction of white women as more important than women of color.

The background for Dinah's tale is Jacob's marriage to Dinah's mothers and the family's return to Canaan. In the film, Dinah idealizes the Rachel/Jacob romance, turning her parent's love into a template for true love. This part of the storyline deserves some consideration. Rachel appears as a hopeless romantic who falls in love with Jacob at first sight. Leah emerges as the more pragmatic of the two sisters, but also envies her sister and desires Jacob. Whereas Laban switches the sisters on their wedding night in the biblical tale, in the film a nervous Rachel fears intercourse and begs Leah to take her place. Rather than being unhappy with Leah, Jacob makes love to her, and together they conspire to

acquire Leah's three sisters as additional wives. This plot frees the women from the control of their drunken and abusive father and places them in the care of a kinder, gentler patriarch. Yet, Jacob is still very much the patriarch of the family, as he reminds his wives on occasion. He demands exclusive allegiance to his male patriarchal god and smashes the goddess figurines secretly venerated by his wives in the red tent.

One of the most notable features in the film is the temporary transformation that Leah undergoes on her wedding night. Their honeymoon is staged as a romantic and mutual sexual initiation typical of the Lifetime Network. When Jacob comments that it is nice to see a post-coital Leah smiling for a change, she explains: "I'm not used to being happy." It seems women's happiness follows one plotline: their fulfillment is found through romantic heterosexual love and children. The tragedy of Leah and Rachel is that one woman is loved while the other is fertile. Despite Jacob's reassurance, Rachel experiences her initial childlessness as a tragic affliction and personal failure for which her skills as a midwife compensate to some extent. Dinah longs to find love like Rachel although she is determined not to share her husband with other women.

The film's heroine is a decidedly modern young woman depicted as caring, headstrong, independent, and beautiful. Her typical behavior is more in keeping with the modern Western world than with expectations of biblical culture. However, *The Red Tent* does not follow patristic interpreters who castigate Dinah for "going out" among the daughters of the land without a chaperone. Rather, the film presents her as venturing into the city with her entire family. There Shalem (Shechem in Genesis 34) first notices her, and a flustered Dinah acknowledges his attention. They next meet when Rachel and Dinah are called to the palace as midwives. The film alters the sequence of events in Genesis so that Shalem and Dinah flirt, fall in love, and marry before their sexual encounter. The character of Prince Shalem, whose altered name in *The Red Tent* connotes peace and wholeness, also conforms to modern romantic sensibilities.[18] He obtains King Hamor's reluctant permission to marry a mere shepherd girl and offers to petition Jacob for his consent. Yet Dinah dismisses this idea, insisting that she alone decides whom she will marry: "This is my life, my future, my choice." Their coupling, depicted as a consensual encounter, is filmed in slow motion with candlelight and piano music (Figure 22.6). Love at first sight gives way to soft-core sexual ecstasy as Dinah's greatest aspirations are briefly realized.

FIGURE 22.6 Dinah and Shalem's mutual seduction. *The Red Tent* (2014).

By the time King Hamor broaches negotiations with Jacob, they are already married by the customs of Shalem's people. Hamor offers Jacob a wagon full of treasures as bride price, but the patriarch, already surrounded by his sons, reacts angrily at not having been consulted before the wedding. When Hamor offers to pay any price Jacob names, the latter indignantly responds: "My daughter's honor is not for sale." It is evident that Jacob's patriarchal pride has been injured. While Simeon and Levi seek to maximize their profit from the situation, Jacob wants to save face and seizes upon the idea of mass circumcision instead of a monetary bride price. If forced to accept foreign marriage practices, he will at least impose part of his own faith and culture on his in-laws. Shalem readily agrees, apologizes for not having sought his father-in-law's consent earlier, and declares his undying love for Dinah.

These scenes make it obvious that Dinah's lost virginity would only bring her and her family dishonor if Jacob refused to recognize her marriage to Shalem. Therefore, the subsequent actions of Simeon and Levi cannot be interpreted as anything other than mercenary. In contrast to Gen. 34:27–29, Jacob's other sons are conspicuously absent from the nighttime massacre and pillaging scenes, with the exception of Joseph who unsuccessfully tries to stop Simeon and Levi. The film ruthlessly excises any allusion to sexual violence, not only in the encounter between Dinah and her prince charming but also in the rape of Hivite women during the raid. Other than Dinah and the queen, no women or children appear in the massacre scenes. Dinah wakes up in a pool of Shalem's blood only to be forcibly abducted by her brothers and returned to Jacob's camp along with the booty they seized.

Upon their return Jacob rebukes his sons, focusing primarily on potential repercussions for the tribe as a whole and only secondarily on the immorality of their actions. However, his speech is dramatically overshadowed by Dinah's

criticism of her father. Placing the blame squarely on Jacob's shoulders, she faults his pride for making the massacre possible and condemning his selfish concerns when his sons committed murder. In the end, the patriarch cannot bring himself to punish his sons and he disregards Dinah's loss because she is "only a daughter" and therefore "nothing more than a piece of property." Cursing Jacob, she renounces her birth family and leaves. They will not be reunited until the end of the film when she forgives Jacob on his deathbed. While emotionally satisfying to modern audiences, Dinah's behavior as depicted in the film does not credibly fit the social conventions of ancient Near Eastern society.[19] Her rebuke of Jacob and subsequent adventures in Egypt are more in keeping with the ideals of a modern-day heroine than an Israelite woman. Clearly, the film is not interested in providing a plausible historical reconstruction of Israelite society. In fact, the anachronistic elements of *The Red Tent* could be read as a welcome critique of cultural norms that unjustly oppressed women, curtailed their agency, and categorized them as less valuable than men. However, such a reading gives the film too much credit.

Overall, *The Red Tent* is a paint-by-numbers pseudo-feminist romance that pays lip service to female solidarity and women's culture. In reality, the film reinforces gender scripts and stereotypes that it claims to challenge. Borrowing familiar tropes from romantic fiction and melodrama, it uses exotic biblical locales as backdrop for a familiar storyline. The most important concern for the female characters is their search for heterosexual passion. It is understood as love at first sight with a mysterious stranger and exemplified by the immediate attraction between Jacob and Rachel. Leah covets this passion, Dinah briefly finds it, and her story is passed down in the red tent to future generations of young girls who hope to find their own handsome prince.

In addition to the portrayal of women as obsessed with heterosexual romantic fantasies, *The Red Tent* also essentializes women by identifying them almost exclusively with menstruation, childbearing, and mothering (Figure 22.7). Unlike female deities in the ancient Near East, the goddesses worshipped in the red tent are exclusively associated with fertility and childbirth.[20] Motherhood is presented as a woman's ultimate aspiration and an all-encompassing obsession that requires and inspires women's self-sacrifice. Rachel considers herself a failure until she has borne a son. Dinah can only find the will to live following the death of Shalem once she discovers that she is pregnant with his child. "He [Dinah's son] was the miracle that kept me alive," she says, "For him, I could bear anything." Indeed, she accepts the role of a slave and sleeps in a rat-infested cellar in order to be a part of her son's life. Another romance eventually rewards

her for decades of selfless devotion.

FIGURE 22.7 The centrality of childbearing in *The Red Tent* (2014).

In short, *The Red Tent* makes Genesis 34 a liberating story by transforming the biblical rape into a tragic romance. Yet, the erasure of violence perpetrated against women (Dinah and the Hivite women) is not a liberating hermeneutical choice in a society that all too often denies the reality of sexual assault and its consequences. Although *The Red Tent* places (white) women in the center of the story, it reinscribes traditional gender scripts that valorize heterosexual romance and motherhood as a (white) woman's greatest and only aspiration. In addition, women like Bilhah and Zilpah who appear as women of color in the film do not follow this heterosexist paradigm and swiftly disappear from the cinematic storyline.

Rape or Romance? Interpretive Trajectories of Genesis 34

How do the films of Sissoko and Young fit within the rich exegetical tradition associated with Genesis 34? The biblical text is riddled with narrative ambiguities, gaps, and silences that interpreters navigate in various ways. Much of this diversity in the interpretive tradition arises from debates among scholars whether the piel of *'anah* denotes "rape."[21] Just as significant are Dinah's silence, narrative marginalization, and lack of subjectivity. These circumstances have permitted widely different, even mutually exclusive, interpretations of her story. Such a high level of textual ambiguity shines a spotlight on the hermeneutical significance of a reader's ideological commitments, leading her or

him to choose one interpretive option over others. How a reader understands Genesis 34 and evaluates the tale's characters depends largely on the values, questions, and assumptions brought to the text by that reader.

Foremost among the many questions is whether the sexual encounter between Dinah and Shechem is consensual or forced. Other questions quickly follow: Is sexual violence a narratively central or peripheral aspect of this story? Which, if any, of the male characters are depicted sympathetically? Is Shechem a sexual predator or a smitten lover? Are Shechem and Hamor *shysters*, or do they negotiate with Jacob in good faith? Is the patriarch's silence indicative of prudence, cowardice, or apathy? Should the behavior of Dinah's brothers be viewed as villainous or heroic? What was their motivation? Why was Dinah in the house of Shechem? What is the narrator's perspective on these events? Why was this text preserved? Is this a tragic love story or a story of rape avenged?

Scholars employ various strategies to answer these and similar questions, resulting in multiple plausible readings of this narrative. However, not all conceivable readings are ethical in their consequences. Three interpretive strategies dominate traditional (i.e., non-feminist) readings, and aspects of each strategy also appear in the two films under discussion here. First, many historical-critical interpreters reconstruct aspects of ancient Near Eastern society to explain or justify the actions of characters in Genesis 34. Based on tentative theories about a woman's place in Israelite society, some historical critics accuse Dinah of flouting cultural expectations when she leaves the safety of her tent to visit the women of the land. They shift blame from the perpetrator of the attack to its victim.[22] Others, like Lyn Bechtel, question the validity of understanding Genesis 34 as a rape text because she asserts that Hebrew lacks a word for rape and that the narrator does not clearly state that Dinah resists Shechem or that Shechem uses force.[23] Such interpretations reinscribe harmful myths that are foundational to rape culture by raising questions about the level of a woman's resistance before she is exonerated of blame for a sexual attack. The definition of rape on the basis of the particular degree of resistance or physical coercion, rather than the absence of consent, creates a situation in which victims of sexual violence are placed on trial.

These views about rape appear in the films, too. Accordingly, Sissoko's film blurs the depiction of sexual violence so that viewers will disagree whether Dinah consented to the encounter with Shechem. Viewers can choose whether to attend to Dinah's screams and tears or to the boys' excited exclamations that Shechem had "finally" taken her up on her repeated flirtations. The recurring accusations from members of both clans also support this ambiguity that

suggests that Dinah seduced the hapless prince and is to blame for the ensuing sexual violence. Likewise, Young's film indicates that Dinah violates her clan's patriarchal marriage customs when she pledges herself to Shalem without her father's permission. Although the Lifetime Film valorizes Dinah for putting love before all else, this practice would certainly have saved many lives and years of heartache. The depiction of Dinah as a romance-addled heroine lacking in common sense reinforces negative gender stereotypes embedded in the romance film genre.

Second, the interpretive strategy that employs the principles of structuralism minimizes the story's potential sexual violence. It interprets the rape as a metaphorical vehicle for addressing "larger" social and political issues, such as xenophobia, identity construction, social disruption, or warfare. Many interpreters, employing this strategy, view Dinah and Shechem not as individuals but as the embodiment of Israel and not-Israel. Their potential union represents the merger of these two categories leading to the loss of Israel's identity.[24] According to this reading, it becomes largely immaterial whether or not the intercourse is consensual because this viewpoint prioritizes the maintenance of firm boundaries between Israel and the nations. As a result, the strategy shifts attention from Dinah to the larger patriarchal group and its welfare. The story about violence against women becomes one about social and political relations among groups of men.

Again, both films pursue this strategy. Sissoko's *La Genèse* uses the Dinah story as a vehicle for addressing larger social concerns, namely internecine warfare and fraternal strife in postcolonial Africa. Genesis turns into a story of warring clans that compete over limited resources. Dinah's rape and the ensuing Shechemite massacre serve as an occasion for a meeting of the nations. However, the purpose of this meeting is not to address sexual violence or war crimes against women but to ease relations among the film's male characters. It includes a negotiation over sexual access to women, culminating in the male leaders forging a group identity to govern said access. In other words, *La Genèse* presupposes that women are objects that can be owned or used to make political statements. Consequently, the reality of sexual violence is eclipsed and other issues become more culturally significant.

Third and finally, many exegetes employ a strategy that focuses on the narrative dynamics as a guide for navigating textual ambiguities. Scholars attuned to the poetics of the Dinah story have produced several plausible readings, in which Genesis 34 is sometimes a rape text and at other times a tragic romance.[25] Once again, these readings reveal as much about the ideological

commitments of the literary critic as they do about the text itself. Young's film, *The Red Tent*, also follows and expands upon the strategy of reading the relationship between Shechem and Dinah as a romance. To facilitate this meaning, the film highlights clues within the text, specifically in Gen. 34:28–29, to depict the motives of Dinah's brothers as materialism and honor rather than concern for their sister's well-being. The film also attributes tender emotions to Shechem in Gen. 34:3 and emphasizes Dinah's continued presence in Shechem's house in Gen. 34:26. Details in the text, such as Dinah's humiliation and narrative marginalization, that are less amenable to this interpretation are dismissed as the patriarchal bias of the canonical account. The film suggests that the hearing of the true story as it actually happened requires that we ourselves must step into the red tent and listen to the women talking about their love lives.

On the positive side, this interpretive strategy enables *The Red Tent* to critique the ideology of the canonical account as one-sided and therefore patriarchal. The visual representation upholds the possibility of a lost alternative tradition that was passed down within a female storytelling culture. Rather than accept the biblical narrator's marginalization of Dinah, the film depicts the story from her fictionally recreated perspective. Unfortunately, *The Red Tent* also utilizes romance genre tropes that ultimately reinscribe the gender scripts that it claims to challenge. The female heroine, thus created, is defined entirely by the search for heterosexual passion, fertility, menstruation, childbirth, and self-sacrificial mothering. On top of it all, the film utilizes a racist subtext in which fair-skinned European and American actors portray the positive characters whereas swarthy Middle Easterners—female and male—portray the villains. These choices perpetuate quasi-biblical justifications for sexist and racist stereotypes.

CONCLUSION

Both Dinah films contribute to the visual interpretation history of Genesis 34. The analysis of such material constitutes a crucial task for the next generation of feminist scholars, as biblical scholars in general increasingly recognize the significance of cultural appropriations of biblical texts within literature, the visual arts, and film. This expansion in the field of biblical studies reflects the scholarly willingness to consider not only the meaning of the biblical texts, but their cultural uses throughout the ages. As reception history emerges as a sub-discipline of biblical research, feminist scholars must venture into heretofore-

unfamiliar territory and analyze the wide spectrum of cultural interpretations found in contemporary media such as film. It is imperative that feminist biblical scholars counter cinematic interpretations of the Bible that diminish and limit women's spheres of activity and authority.

The significance of feminist analysis of cinematic interpretations cannot be stressed enough. The film industry, including works produced by studios and independent filmmakers, naturalize and legitimize systems of dominance. Films provide images and support ideologies about women as ontologically different from men and with different functions in society. This cultural influence is perhaps doubly significant at the intersection of Bible and film. It extends far beyond films retelling biblical stories, such as those discussed in this essay. It also includes subtle forms of cinematic references to the biblical tradition, among them films quoting or alluding to biblical texts (e.g., *Pulp Fiction*), films reworking biblical themes and characters (e.g., *A Serious Man*), and films functioning like scripture in the subject matter addressed (e.g., *The Tree of Life*). Significant feminist scholarly analysis remains to be done in the intersection of film and Bible.

Finally, when feminist scholars engage biblical texts as they appear in new media, such as film, they destabilize the very idea of "canons" as fixed hegemonic documents. The Bible has never existed in a singular, static form, just as no clear boundaries exist between the text's so-called "original" meaning and its later receptions. Rather than arbitrarily privileging as canonical one form of a text, feminist scholars ought to recognize the diverse and ever-changing biblical discourse across cultures and across many different media. This democratizing project ought to be of interest to feminist and other scholars when they are committed to challenging hegemonic authority in all its forms.

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[1] I use the term "film" loosely in reference to motion pictures (of whatever length and in whatever form) produced for theatrical release, made for television, or transmitted via other audio-visual media outlets. Likewise, I speak of "*the* Bible" for the sake of simplicity while recognizing that, even beyond issues of canon, the Bible is an ever-evolving text, and films participate in the ongoing, culturally specific production and interpretation of bibles; see Rhonda Burnette-Bletsch, "The Bible and its Cinematic Reception," in *The Bible in Motion*, Vol. 1, ed. R. Burnette-Bletsch (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 1–16.

[2] Sharon H. Ringe, "When Women Interpret the Bible," in *Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsome, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley (third ed.; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 1.

[3] This defense might take a variety of forms such as arguing that the texts are "only" ideological wishful thinking and not descriptive of social reality (e.g., unenforced legal codes, fictional conquest narratives) or in keeping with the cultural values of the era (slavery, patriarchy). While these explanations of violent texts might be accurate, it is still essential that oppressive ideologies in the text be recognized and critiqued as such. More insidious is the apologetic tendency that defends *any* action of the Israelites as justified in the name of national purity. Below I point out how these apologetics function in relation to the Dinah story. See also Susanne Scholz, "Back Then It Was Legal: The Epistemological Imbalance in Readings of Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Rape Legislation; with a Retrospective," *Journal of Religion and Abuse* 7.3 (2005): 5–35.

[4] Sissoko's vision is similarly stated by Scholz, "Belonging to All Humanity: Die Dina Episode (Gen 34) und ihre Aktualisierung im Film La Genése von Cheick Oumar Sissoko," in *Religion und Gewalt im Bibelfilm* (ed. Reinhold Zwick; Marburg: Schüren, 2012), 65–81. My analysis of the film's androcentricism agrees by and large with hers although I am less convinced that the sexual encounter it portrays between Dinah and Shechem is consensual. See also Burnette-Bletsch, "Cheick Oumar Sissoko: West African Activist and Storyteller," in *The Bible in Motion*, Vol. 1, ed. Rhonda Burnette-Bletsch (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 701–12.

[5] Mali gained independence from French colonial rule in 1960. But its first democratically elected president, Modibo Keïta, was unseated in 1968 by a French-supported military coup led by Moussa Traoré, who established a corrupt dictatorship that lasted until 1991. During these years of growing economic disparity between rich and poor, a severe drought claimed thousands of lives in rural Mali. Sissoko's early films focus on exposing the political corruption of Traoré's regime. Sissoko describes the purpose of these films as "the awakening of consciousness by explaining to the population that their misery, the fact that they are exploited, is not due to fatalism or Allah's will. It's due to the social relations of exploitation existing in that society, to the fact that a minority is exploiting them"; see Manthia Diawara, Elizabeth Robinson, and Cheick Oumar Sissoko, "New Perspectives in African Cinema: An Interview with Cheick Oumar Sissoko," *Film Quarterly* 41.1 (1987–88): 46. For a fuller discussion of Sissoko's political context, see Burnette-Bletsch, "Cheick Oumar Sissoko," 702–703.

[6] Jacob's blue-clad clan may be a reference to Mali's semi-nomadic Teureg people, popularly known as the "Blue Men of the Desert"; see Lindiwe Dovey, *African Film and Literature: Adapting Violence to Screen* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2009) 256. Esau's group carries a turtle perhaps as a symbol of the ideal nomad who travels with its home; see also Walter Metz, "Adapting Genesis," *Literature and Film Quarterly* 35 (2007): 231–32.

[7] Actors in the film speak Bambara, the local dialect of Mali. Quotations in this essay are extracted from the English subtitles.

[8] Scholz criticizes the film for failing to represent the seizure of Hivite women (Gen. 34:29) or accurately depicting the mass rapes that typically accompanied African genocides; see Scholz, "Belonging to All Humanity," 77–78. After repeated viewings of the scene, I determined that the film does hint at two rapes, but these details are easy to miss in the chaos of the massacre. Moreover, rape is not mentioned when the massacre is discussed later in the film.

[9] Even today widows might be pressured to ward off this curse by undergoing "sexual cleansing" (i.e., having unprotected sex with a male relative of her husband or a professional cleanser). I found references to this practice in countries neighboring Mali, but not in Mali itself. See Rachel Awuor, "Widow Cleansing: Good Intentions—Negative Consequences," n.p. [cited November 1, 2007]; available at http://scripts.farmradio.fm/radio-resource-packs/package-82/widow-cleansing-good-intentions-negative-consequences/ [accessed on June 5, 2017].

[10] The film relies heavily on Mali's traditional *koteba* theater as a storytelling device; see Burnette-Bletsch, "Cheick Oumar Sissoko," 207.

[11] Jacob explains Esau's anger with him by retelling via flashback the story in which his brother traded his birthright for a bowl of soup (Gen. 25). This feature allows another story from Genesis to find its way into Sissoko's film, but he maintains a righteous image of the patriarch by omitting Genesis 27.

[12] Scholz, "Belonging to All Humanity," 65.

[13] Anita Diamont, *The Red Tent* (New York, NY: Wyatt Books, 1997).

[14] Rabbi Liza Stern, quoted by Susannah Meadows, "Meeting under the Big Tent," *Newsweek* 137.7 (February 5, 2001): 76.

[15] Novel and film present goddess worship as more tolerant and life affirming than the biblical religion of the patriarchs.

[16] The miniseries attributes seven sons to Leah (cf. six sons in Genesis 29–30) and two to Rachel although only Joseph, Reuben, Simon, and Levi are singled out by name and maternity. This attribution leaves only two unspecified sons born to Bilhah and Zilpah. The film does not mention a sexual encounter between Reuben and Bilhah (cf. Gen. 35:22).

[17] The swarthy Simeon and Levi are sons of fair-skinned Jacob and Leah. Likewise, Esau inexplicably has darker hair and complexion than Jacob.

[18] Vladimir Tumanov, "Dinah's Rage: The Retelling of Genesis 34 in Anita Diamant's *The Red Tent*and Thomas Mann's *Joseph and His Brothers*," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 34.4 (2007): 378.

[19] Lyn M. Bechtel, "What If Dinah Is Not Raped? (Genesis 34)," *JSOT* 62 (1994): 21–23.

[20] Sandra Hack Polaski, *Inside the Red Tent* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2006), 50–70.

[21] To my mind, it has been convincingly argued that this term denotes "rape" in particular circumstances; see, e.g., Sandie Gravett, "Reading 'Rape' in the Hebrew Bible: A Consideration of Language," *JSOT* 28.3 (2004): 279–99.

[22] Emily Barth, "The Dinah Affair: A Cultural Interpretation of Genesis 34," *Journal of Theta Alpha Kappa* 32.2 (2008): 37–38.

[23] Bechtel reconstructs ancient Israel as a group-oriented society, in which intercourse was only shameful if it violated existing bonds or could not lead to matrimony. She argues that the sexual encounter between Dinah and Shechem was illicit not because it was nonconsensual, but because it would violate the ideal of endogamy; Bechtel, "What If Dinah Is Not Raped?," 25–27. For a feminist analysis of Bechtel's reading, see Scholz, *Rape Plots*, 109–12. Angela Wagner argues that the sexual violation of an unattached virgin was not legally considered rape in the ancient Near East; see her "Considering the Politico-Juridical Proceedings

of Genesis 34," *JSOT* 38.2 (2013): 145–61. Neither Bechtel nor Wagner view Genesis 34 as a rape text in part because it offers no unambiguous language denoting coercion or protest. Joseph Fleishman goes even further, arguing on rather shaky historical-critical grounds that Genesis 34 should not be understood as a rape text even if Shechem did use force and Dinah withheld consent because Shechem's intention was abduction marriage; see Joseph Fleishman, "Shechem and Dinah—in the Light of Nonbiblical and Biblical Sources," *ZAW* 116.1 (2004): 29–30. All of these studies establish a problematic (re)definition of rape based upon factors such as the level of resistance exerted by the victim, the level of force used by the perpetrator, or the intentions of the perpetrator. For a comprehensive analysis of these and many other recent scholarly readings, see Scholz, *Rape Plots*, 91–125.

[24] See, e.g., Seth Kunin, *We Think What We Eat: Neo-Structuralist Analysis of Israelite Food Rules and Other Cultural and Textual Practices* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 20; Kathryn Lopez, "Telling and Retelling the Story of Dinah: Violent Storytelling as Social Formation," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 42.3 (2015): 275–82. More specifically, Alice Keefe views Dinah's raped body in Genesis 34 as a metonym for the martial and cultural threat that urban Canaanite culture posed to Israel. In other words, she understands Dinah story not as a tale of personal tragedy but as a metaphorical way of speaking about the social body as it is disrupted by war; see Alice Keefe, "Rapes of Women/Wars of Men," *Semeia* 61 (1993): 79–97.

[25] Meir Sternberg famously argues for the biblical narrator's inexorable control of the text, which would lead any competent reader to the intended meaning. He reads Genesis 34 as a rape text in which the narrator marginalizes Dinah, who is treated merely as a "lexical item" in the story, and valorizes her brothers; see Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), 50–51, 480. In response, Danna Nolan Fewell and David Gunn offered an alternative reading of Genesis 34 as a tragic love story; see Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, "Tipping the Balance: Sterberger's Reader and the Rape of Dinah," *JBL* 110.2 (1991): 193–211. For a feminist evaluation of the Sternberg-Fewell/Gun dispute, see Scholz, *Rape Plots*, 121–3. See also Todd Penner and Lillian Cates who analyze the modern desire to delimit signification in texts like Genesis 34. Todd Penner and Lillian Cates, "Textually Violating Dinah: Literary Readings, Colonizing Interpretations, and the Pleasure of the Text," *The Bible and Critical Theory* 3.3 (2007): 1–18.

CHAPTER 23

EXPLORING BIBLICAL WOMEN IN MUSIC

HELEN LENEMAN

THIS essay explores various musical works that retell the stories of biblical women who often linger in the background of biblical narratives but come to the foreground in musical retellings. In musical works, women's voices add new elements to their depiction. Similarly, librettos almost always enlarge these women's roles,[1] turning them into three-dimensional characters. Music thus offers new and surprising perspectives on biblical women's stories that biblical texts do not articulate in the same way as the musical works do. The one thread shared in these women's stories is that they are merely "supporting actors" in stories about men, such as Abraham, Moses, and David. In the biblical tales, these men are the primary focus; women appear only to advance the story of the patriarchs. In the text, female characters appear only in relation to male characters. Yet, in musical works, this pattern is sometimes altered. Much more time is given to developing the women as characters in their own right.

Many musical works depict biblical women with prominent roles. Among them are Sarah, Hagar, and Rebecca in the book of Genesis; Jochebed, Pharaoh's daughter, and Miriam in the book of Exodus; and Michal and Bathsheba in the books of Samuel. Operas and oratorios include these women more often than other female characters, perhaps due to their connections to well-known male characters. Within the musical "midrashic" retellings, three elements stand out. First, some women are presented as far more pious than their biblical counterparts. Second, their relationships with men, whether they are lovers or husbands, are characterized by mutual love. Third, when these women move to

the foreground, a crucial element in the midrashic retellings is the use of the human voice.

In music, unlike speech or written text, voice type directly establishes the relative age and features of each character. Categories of voice types are based on both range and timbre (the quality of the sound). The soprano is the highest female voice, while the mezzo-soprano (mezzo) combines the range and qualities of the alto and soprano. The qualities of a voice have led to certain conventions in casting: a younger woman is generally portrayed by a soprano whereas an older or seductive woman is often played by a mezzo or alto. Thus, a dramatic soprano or mezzo voice represents an assertive and powerful woman, such as Miriam. These traditions are true more for opera, which is staged, than oratorio, which is not. The human voice conveys the depth and power of emotion through inflection, color, and tone in every historical era. In this sense, music is the most visceral medium, drawing an immediate reactions from its listeners.

Nine sections organize the following analysis of biblical women in Western classical music. The first section focuses on musical depictions of Sarah's love for Abraham. The second section examines the musical focus on motherhood and infertility in the relationship between Sarah and Hagar. The third section presents the musical characterization of Sarah's relationship with Isaac. The fourth section scrutinizes the possible triangular relationship among Hagar, Abraham, and Ishmael. The fifth section examines musical portrayals of Rebecca as pious and obedient. The sixth section concentrates on musical descriptions of Jochebed and Pharaoh's daughter as mothers. The seventh section presents music that portrays Miriam as a strong leader. The eighth section analyzes musical portrayals of Michal as a woman in love. The ninth section highlights music presenting Bathsheba as more than a seductress. A conclusion summarizes the main points and indicates why biblical research on musical depictions matters in the feminist study of the Bible.

Sarah's Love for Abraham

When musical works give Sarah a major role, they focus on the different relationships in her life. Often, these works examine her interactions with Abraham, Hagar, and Isaac. The retellings of those relationships are midrashic additions to their biblical counterparts, and they give Sarah a more prominent role than the biblical texts. For example, when God calls Abraham to leave his

homeland, Abraham wanders together with his wife Sarah. The reader could be excused for forgetting that the couple journeys together, in the biblical text, since Sarah is never mentioned. According to the biblical story, Abraham neither shares God's call with his wife nor consults her about God's plan for them. She is expected to follow him without questioning. By contrast, in musical retellings Sarah has a presence and a voice. She steps out of the biblical shadows to express her feelings through music.

Similarly, when Abraham passes Sarah off as his sister in the biblical narrative, she remains silent (Gen. 12:10–20; 20:1–16). Women's invisibility is the ultimate manifestation of a patriarchal society, with Sarah condemned to a literary chador. The biblical Sarah never expresses feelings for Abraham. Composers of every era have felt the need to fill this gap. Usually, they created a love story that transcends the biblical tale of patriarchy and submission. Perhaps they assume that a woman would only follow a man if they loved each other. Or, perhaps they were articulating the patriarchal notion that a woman would eventually love any man she was forced to follow. In Martin Blumner's (1827–1901) oratorio *Abraham* (1862),[2] Sarah sings a lyrical love song to Abraham (p. 36).[3] It reads: "When you left, the sun vanished, and when you returned, it did too … [You] awaken the wonder of life . … " The music is highly romantic, reminiscent of Blumner's contemporaries, Robert Schumann and Felix Mendelssohn. In the music Sarah becomes an appealingly emotional three-dimensional figure, as she expresses her love for Abraham.

Similar expressions of love are present in later works. American composer Ezra Laderman's (1924–2015) opera *Sarah* (1958),[4] produced for the CBS television series "Look Up and Live," imagines great love between Sarah and Abraham, as expressed in the following dialog:

> ABRAHAM:Was it long ago, Sarah, that I first saw your feet, lovely and white in the cold silver stream?
> SARAH:Long ago, long ago.
> ABRAHAM:I will follow those feet to the opposite shore and there I will seize them and bind them to me so that forever they will follow me.

Sarah responds that she cannot follow him and has fallen behind, ending with the plea: "Get a child, Abraham!" The poignancy of both the music and the text adds layers of pathos to the story as it reveals the couple's deep love for one another. Yet, the biblical narrative does not suggest any of these emotions, indicating the depth of patriarchy assumed for both women and men.[5] In the music, Sarah

becomes more emotionally accessible than in the Bible. Obviously, neither the composers nor their librettists were writing a commentary on patriarchy or the position of women. They were only offering personal interpretations. Much like a midrash, musical retellings fill in the blanks and add imagined emotions to the characters.

Another example of this approach appears in *Sarah and Hagar* (2008),[6] an opera composed by Gerald Cohen (1960–). He too imagines a loving relationship between Sarah and Abraham, although they express their love for each other only after the birth of Ishmael. In a duet, Abraham and Sarah sing of their mutual love, their long life, and the "wondrous world wherein all that was promised is ours." Their lines almost step on each other as if each is completing the other's thoughts. Near the end of the duet, they sing many of their lines in unison, musically suggesting unity of thought and intimacy. They rejoice in their future, which starts with their own "miracle, the sweetest tale to tell: the tale of Ishmael."[7]

Issues of Motherhood and Infertility in the Sarah-Hagar Relationship

Just as the biblical writers ignore Sarah's relationship with Abraham, they sideline Sarah's interaction with Hagar. In fact, Sarah neither mentions Hagar's name nor addresses her directly in the biblical text. Modern writers and composers step into this gap. Hagar is certainly one of the most interesting female characters in the Hebrew Bible. She has a voice and expresses her feelings, inspiring many composers over the centuries to set her words to music. Two contemporary American composers, Ezra Laderman and Gerald Cohen (both discussed above), imagine a close relationship between Sarah and Hagar in their operas. While the idea that Sarah and Hagar are close friends may accommodate contemporary sensibilities, we should not forget that Hagar was Sarah's slave. Consequently, friendship between the two women seems highly unlikely. Yet, in both *Sarah* (1959) and *Sarah and Hagar* (2008), both women express desires, conflicting emotions, fears, joy, jealousy, love, and hate toward each other. Although the biblical text reports only sparsely on their feelings, composers underline Sarah's and Hagar's emotions with music.

Both Laderman's and Cohen's operas emphasize the significance of motherhood to the women. In Laderman's opera, God's angel tells Sarah that she

will be called “the mother of nations.” This promise leads to Sarah singing a joyful paean about the “fruitful season” in lilting music (p. 28). When Sarah hears of Hagar’s pregnancy, she brings Hagar water. She also asks Hagar to confide in her “as to a mother” about her feelings of carrying Abraham’s child. This last phrase is sung poignantly (p. 29). Hagar bursts into a song of rapture to a dance rhythm and “smiling to herself” (notes in score, p. 31). Since any mention of the women’s feelings about being pregnant is completely absent in the biblical narrative, the musical exploration fills a notable gap.

Motherhood also remains the focus of the Sarah-Hagar relationship in Gerald Cohen’s 2008 opera. In an emotional and highly lyric aria, Hagar expresses her deepest feelings:

> There is a life breathing in me … my scent, my air; a life that drinks my tears, thinks my thoughts, shares my blood; a life that feeds on me and grows yet keeps me whole . … I tremble, amazed that from me out of me will soon come another. I will be a mother.[8]

In both operas, expressions of Hagar’s feelings about her pregnancy give her a human face. Her character is focused on pregnancy and motherhood, as is Sarah’s. It is significant that the male librettists considered women’s feelings worth exploring,[9] as the biblical story reduces them to a minimum.

Cohen’s opera also explores another aspect of the relationship between Sarah and Hagar. It is related to Sarah’s infertility. She shares with Hagar her despairing thoughts over her infertility that haunts her even when she sleeps. Hagar’s music is generally more lyrical than Sarah’s, making her a more sympathetic character. This musical depiction illustrates the power of music to create a subtext. Although both women never exchange words in the Bible, the opera not only imagines their dialog, but sets a certain tone for both women’s characters. Hagar tries to comfort Sarah by reminding her that she is loved “by a giant among men” who does not demand children of her. In a duet Sarah repeats in a much lower range that she loves Abraham, but that God promised them descendants (p. 15). Sarah continues to sing of their need for a son while Hagar sings high above her about her wish to ease Sarah’s pain, saying she would do anything to help her (p. 17). In spoken dialog, two characters cannot speak at the same time. But in these musical compositions they do, and the contrast of range and melody of the women’s singing creates a dynamic between them that is only possible in music.

The musical explorations of women’s feelings about each other and their pregnancies add layers of depth and humanity to the portrayals of Sarah and Hagar. When Hagar responds to Sarah’s confession, she shares her own dreams

of having a son. The confession inspires Sarah to sing a beautiful lullaby about her love for Hagar (p. 22). Hagar joins in the lullaby, "as she has done countless times before" (score notes, p. 23), suggesting they had this conversation previously. It is fair to assume that in ancient Israel two childless women would spend time fantasizing about having a child, even though Hagar might have been too young to be considered childless. When Hagar becomes pregnant in the opera, Sarah is jealous and furious that she was not told first. An angry scene ensues that, underlined by musical devices, highlights both women's differences in temperament.[10]

Sarah's Relationship with Isaac

Another relationship favored in musical retellings pertains to Sarah and Isaac, primarily as it appears in Genesis 22, the Akedah. Although the biblical text does not include Sarah in this passage, some librettists and composers incorporate her hypothetical reaction to the event. The inclusion of Sarah and her response to her son's near-sacrifice adds an entirely new and welcome element to the story. In Cohen's opera, Sarah sings "quietly, in shock" (p. 231) after Abraham tells her where he will take Isaac: "To have a son and be alive to know he will not grow to have a son." Noticeably, this line is the same text that Hagar sings about Ishmael to similar music. The repetition connects the stories of both women, as the composer and librettist see parallels between Sarah and Hagar as both being threatened with the loss of their sons. The spotlight, shifting from the males—Abraham, Isaac, and Ishmael—to the women, creates a different focus in the music than that in the biblical story.

The same shift appears in Ildebrano Pizzetti's (1880–1968) *La Rappresentazione di Abram e d'Isaac* (1928),[11] with a libretto based on a fifteenth-century text similar to a mystery play. In the opera Sarah wakes up one morning to find Abraham and Isaac gone. She cries and calls out to everyone in the household. In heartrending music in which violas play a sobbing sound and oboes and other winds accompany the lament, Sarah sings:

> Does anyone know where Abraham and my beautiful Isaac are? They left three days ago; in my heart I feel a hammer beating; their leaving without a word grieves my mind and has broken my body.[12]

Even without the powerful, pulsating music to which these words are sung, this opera expands Sarah's part that is much reduced in the Bible. In the latter, she

disappears after Abraham takes Isaac away. The gap, felt by readers of every era, is convincingly filled in the musical interpretation. Three days later Sarah still raves and grieves, as she does not know where her husband and son are. The extended emotional scenes, depicting Sarah's grief and worry, are a beautiful example of corrective gap-filling. The reconciliation scene between Sarah and Isaac at the end is particularly moving for its intensity. Both musical works, then, add emotional depth to Sarah that is absent in the biblical tale. The music imagines her response to Isaac's near-sacrifice, rounding out her character in satisfying ways.

Hagar's Relationships with Abraham and Ishmael

Hagar is also featured in many musical settings, going far beyond her literary depiction in the well-known biblical expulsion scenes (Genesis 16; 21). Some musical retellings create relationships between Hagar and Abraham or Hagar and Ishmael. These imaginative scenarios develop new dimensions to Hagar's character. Interestingly, the biblical narrative does not imagine a relationship between Hagar and Abraham, and so composers often decide that this gap deserves attention. One highly imaginative retelling occurs in Laderman's opera, which opens with Hagar watching her own bridal procession led by Abraham. Of course, historically a wedding between any two people, let alone between a head of household and a slave, would not have taken place. Still, Laderman's interpretation creatively portrays an imaginary triangular relationship between Hagar, Sarah, and Abraham. Like any good midrash, the music responds to an extensive and intriguing speculation about "What if . … "

In the opening scene Sarah and Hagar speak with each other. Sarah reinforces Hagar's duty to produce a child, and Hagar expresses her misgivings and ambivalence about sleeping with an old man. The women's different ages and personalities are sharply etched in the music. Hagar, a soprano, sings long, lyrical lines while Sarah's lower lines are abrupt and harsh. This scene illustrates how music transcends the power of the spoken word or the written text. The opera deals with Hagar's emotions as she is forced to sleep with an old man, even as it addresses Sarah's encouragement given that Hagar is her only means to providing a child for Abraham. After Sarah expels Hagar in the opera, Hagar begs Abraham not to put her in Sarah's hands. Yet Abraham responds to Hagar: "You came late to my life; this is the wife of my youth. Carry my child safe,

Hagar." The Hagar-Sarah-Abraham triangle becomes a deeply sad and troublingly human story, particularly for the women, that adds layers of pathos and empathy to a story so often read but rarely felt in this way.

Several musical settings depict how Hagar interacts with Ishmael, particularly during their expulsion to the desert. It is a particularly disturbing biblical scene. In Cohen's opera slow plodding music suggests Hagar and Ishmael walking sluggishly through the desert. When they pause to rest, Ishmael asks Hagar if there is more water and she simply replies: "No." He then asks if she can walk any further, and she again answers: "No." In very sparsely accompanied music, which evokes isolation and helplessness, Hagar sings:

> I knew this day might come, we were both always at their mercy, and yet . … I know you loved them both, I loved them once as well, and they gave me you, my son.

The biblical narrative does not include any dialog between Hagar and Ishmael. Further, the musical setting heightens the intense feeling between mother and son. The suggestion that both Hagar and Ishmael might have loved their master in spite of their treatment adds an odd twist to the story.

Both Austrian composer Franz Schubert (1797–1828) and Spanish composer Juan Crisóstomo de Arriaga (1806–26) wrote music that focuses on Hagar and Ishmael. They were child geniuses and, as teenagers, wrote lengthy ballads about Hagar with Ishmael in the desert. Schubert was 14 years old when he wrote this lament, 'Hagars Klage,' as his first song. Arriaga was probably around 19 years old when he composed his song, 'Agar dans le desert,' his last before his early death. The major difference between their ballads is that Arriaga's work, called a *scena*, is orchestrated and includes a part for Ishmael. In contrast, Schubert's work is for soprano soloist and piano accompaniment. Both compositions are about fifteen minutes long.[13] The songs highlight the pathos of Hagar's exile with her son, and emphasize Hagar's role as a mother. As the biblical writer was not interested in Hagar as a mother, both musical adaptations fill in this gap convincingly. They add great poignancy and depth to the portrayal of Hagar, creating a three-dimensional woman, a mother who is about to lose her son.

A Pious and Obedient Rebecca at the Well

The well-known scene of Rebecca at the well (Genesis 24), the first "betrothal type-scene" in the Hebrew Bible,[14] has served as source material for three

ninteenth-century oratorios. They are *Rebecca*, written by Ferdinand Hiller (1811–85) and published in 1877;[15] *Rébecca: Scène Biblique*, written by César Franck (1822–90) and published in 1881;[16] and *Rébecca: Oratorio*, written by Célanie Carissan (1843–1927) and published in 1893. Carissan is a largely unknown woman composer.

In the biblical text, Rebecca is portrayed as energetic, assertive, physically strong, and a beautiful virgin. In addition to these qualities, she proves to have almost superhuman strength and stamina. Rebecca is shown to be a doer rather than a speaker, through the excessive number of action-verbs ascribed to her.[17] These qualities are rarely evidenced in biblical descriptions of women, and composers highlight them in Rebecca's story. Still, differences remain; all three oratorios present Rebecca as more pious than she appears in the biblical narrative. The addition of the qualities of piety and submissiveness temper her biblical portrayal as a strong and confident woman.

An important musical depiction of Rebecca is found in Ferdinand Hiller's oratorio *Rebecca*. Her heroic feat of watering the camels is not included, mostly because oratorios are not staged and because this one lacks a narrator. Instead, Rebecca sings an aria "with fire and soul" ("mit Feuer und Seele") that captures her sweetness and assertiveness. She sings praises of God not found in the biblical account in a soaring melody that creates an image of Rebecca who is not only sweet, assertive, and strong, but also devoted to God. It is conventional in biblical oratorios to create characters who are more pious than their biblical counterparts. Between her expressions of faith, Rebecca urges Eliezer to drink and refresh himself. In an example of music's ability to create a subtext, Eliezer's initial question, "Do you want to come with me, to become the wife of my master's son?," is in G-flat major, but when he repeats the question, a striking modulation to A major suggests optimism. Rebecca's immediate and resolute response is, "Yes! I want to come with you," which she sings in another and even higher key, C-sharp major. This key is brighter than C major, communicating her subdued but still joyous and hopeful response.

Rebecca continues with a lengthy lilting, upbeat prayer to God (p. 68). It further accentuates her piety and also suggests that strong faith motivates her. She knows that God does not lead her astray, so she agrees to follow the stranger into a foreign land, and marry a man she never met. When Rebecca leaves with Eliezer, her family pleads with him to delay the departure. There is a pressing urgency in the appeal, and the music heightens the sense of desperation. Although the biblical account does not mention any emotional response, the musical depiction makes the drama of the moment deeply felt. When Eliezer

insists that they must leave now, Rebecca breaks in and sings very assertively, with each note accented: “Let us go, since God wants it!” She ends on a loud and sustained g´´ (p. 79). Her final “Farewell” is sung *a cappella* several times, with rests between the repetitions that seem to represent sighs. The farewell scene reveals Rebecca’s doubts and sadness in profoundly touching lyrics and musical devices. This very emotional moment in the music expands the terse biblical account in which Rebecca does not even bid farewell to her family.

César Franck’s oratorio, *Rébecca: Scène Biblique*, omits many of the verses that depict Rebecca’s strength and independence. The librettist and composer creates a pale version of Rebecca, reflecting the feminine ideal of the nineteenth century.[18] Rebecca’s first lengthy aria is a prayer, another example of the nineteenth-century emphasis on biblical characters’ piety. She is diminished in this cantata, and does not show the strength and boldness of her biblical counterpart. Rather, Rebecca is a sweet young virgin passively accepting her fate. In her meeting with Eliezer, the music is highly expressive and lyrical. It modulates to the unusual and very bright key of F-sharp major, with six sharps, as he sings: “Our country will be your homeland, our God your God.” In contrast to the biblical plot in which Rebecca’s father is presumably dead, Franck’s oratorio shows Rebecca telling Eliezer that her father arranges her life and that she obeys his wishes as if they were a sacred command. Her two lines are sung to the same melody, but the second line is a step higher and thus sounds very affirming. The musical emphasis on patriarchal authority makes the tale even more misogynist than the biblical text. The oratorio takes the plot only up to the meeting with Laban. The solos and duets for Rebecca and Eliezer are heartfelt and often moving. They represent an effective musical midrash that is less interested in gap filling and character development than other musical settings. The expectations of the nineteenth century may have constrained the composer in his oratorio.

A third example of Rebecca’s positive depiction appears in Célanie Carissan’s *Rébecca: Oratorio*.[19] No information on this oratorio’s performance history is available and it has never been recorded. The librettist for *Rébecca* is listed as E. De Nassirac, a frequent collaborator. This name seems to be a pseudonym that Carissan used for herself. Apparently, she wrote all of her own texts, as the name Nassirac is Carissan spelled backwards. In Carissan’s oratorio, a harp arpeggio introduces Rebecca’s appearance. Musically, the harp arpeggio stands for purity or holiness. Cascading harp arpeggios accompany Rebecca’s aria consistently. The music of this substantial aria (pp. 25–30) expresses Rebecca’s sweetness and cheerfulness as she encourages Eliezer to drink. She also tells him how happy

she is to have been chosen to give water to him and his flocks. Repeatedly, she urges him to drink, and her final repetition reaches b flat´´, which is dramatically high in the register. The musical outburst expresses Rebecca's passion (p. 30). The aria concludes with the same harp passages of the opening, all of which underlines the idea of her purity.

Later in Carissan's oratorio, Laban resists Eliezer's plea to take Rebecca away. Rebecca sings that she fearlessly hears a "holy voice calling me." When she sings, "I will go," she again asserts her trust in God. The biblical Rebecca does not refer to God when she decides to leave and marry Isaac. Similar to composers of other oratorios, Carissan makes Rebecca more pious than the biblical account suggests, perhaps reflecting values of the composer's times. Rebecca continues in ascending, high vocal lines to express that her soul is thrilled (*ravie*) although she must leave. In reality, a young girl who is forced to marry a man whom she never met would feel trepidation and fear rather than joy. Yet, this and other oratorios only highlight Rebecca's obedience and piety. Admittedly, it is disappointing that a woman composer followed the social norms of her time so completely, but perhaps it was her only option to gain professional recognition.

Other feelings are, however, further explored in this oratorio. In a beautiful farewell aria, Rebecca expresses her regret at leaving her home and friends. She also sings of her faith in God. In contrast, the biblical Rebecca expresses neither regret nor happiness about leaving her home and submitting to a future husband. This unusual retelling is extracted from her simple response, "I will," in Gen. 24:58 when she is asked to leave and follow Eliezer. The reader is left to ponder Rebecca's feelings. Does she have doubts or feelings of sadness? The libretto leaves nothing for its listeners to ponder. Its androcentric and religious message comes through loud and clear, assuming that Rebecca is ready to leave everything because God is calling her and because she wants to submit to a husband. Again, it would be easier to accept such a retelling from a male librettist, but why did Carissan interpret Rebecca in this way? Did she try to dampen any suspicion that a woman's hand was doing the retelling? Does her view reflect the values of her era or what she had been taught about the Bible? I prefer to think she wrote as she thought a man would write. Nonetheless, her music creates an appealing Rebecca, albeit in the androcentric mold of an obedient and compliant woman.

Finally, the last element that stands out in Carissan's oratorio is the character Isaac. In this musical retelling he emerges as a romantic hero, a role which his casting as a tenor reinforces. This musical choice makes it more understandable

that Rebecca immediately falls in love with him. The biblical Isaac is also said to love Rebecca (Gen. 24:67), and so expressions of love reflect the biblical tale. In the libretto Rebecca reciprocates his feelings. For instance, after trading superlatives Rebecca sings "passionately" (score note), sexualizing Rebecca in a way not found in the biblical text. She sings, "Take my rapturous soul," on a long descending line that communicates total submission. The couple sings passionate declarations over strumming harp and constant high *tremolos*, which are musical depictions of rapture.

Jochebed and Pharaoh's Daughter as Mothers

In several musical works, the three women in the Moses birth story receive greatly enlarged roles. They are Jochebed, the Egyptian princess, and Miriam. Neither Jochebed nor Moses's mother nor Pharaoh's daughter are mothers like Sarah and Hagar. Primarily concerned with saving Moses, they are props moving the male-centered story forward. Since they are characters dependent on the men in the story, in this case a male infant, they disappear from the narrative when the boy is saved. Their story as mothers is fragmentary but the music amplifies their roles and makes them more relevant than the biblical text.

One major work is the lengthy opera, entitled *Moses: Sacred Opera in Two Parts and Eight Tableaux* (1891), written by Anton Rubinstein (1829–94).[20] It is the only work that presents Moses's life from his birth to his death. Interestingly, Miriam's voice is the first voice to be heard, and the biblical scene about hiding baby Moses is greatly expanded. Both Miriam and Jochebed sing about their feelings, and the princess, named Asnath, joins them for a quartet about motherhood. Jochebed, agreeing to serve the princess, is by herself when she sings: "My heart is beating loudly in my breast, only secretly dare I nurture this sweet, nameless mother's joy," over insistent triplets in the orchestra that represent her heartbeat (p. 25). Miriam echoes her mother's words. Lost in their thoughts, Asnath and her slave join them in another quartet. Asnath sings that she recognizes the hand of God when the wet nurse arrives at her palace, and she and her slave express gratitude to their goddess (p. 26, top). It is ironic that the women see the hand of God in these events but their divinities are different. According to my research, Exodus 2 is not treated in any other opera or oratorio. Thus, Rubinstein's music is a true midrash that humanizes the women who

express their longings, expectations, and joy. The focus for all of them is on mothering the found baby[21] Later in the opera, Moses indicates that he knows that his biological mother nursed him:

> My own mother was given to me as a wet nurse, and with her guidance I learned who I am.

One of the larger gaps in the biblical tale concerns the motivation of Pharaoh's daughter. Is she longing for children of her own because she could not get pregnant? Since she recognizes Moses as a Hebrew child, does she save him knowing she is acting subversively? Or is she deliberately rebelling against her father and his decree? These are all possible motives, but it is up to readers to choose one of them, as the biblical text does not offer an answer. Pharaoh's daughter appears as a human instrument in Moses's survival, and Rubinstein's opera explores her character in depth. Her thoughts, hopes, and dreams make her a woman of flesh and blood. Music and text also bring deep feelings to the moment when Asnath finds the baby. She sings: "He is opening his eyes and smiling, and reaches his arms out to me, O lovely angelic face!" (21, bottom). She sings these words over soft arpeggios to lyrical music. The music turns Pharaoh's daughter into a compassionate and emotionally available character, as the music expands the terse biblical report in touching and tender ways. The princess also plays a significant role in the later parts of the opera. Following a summary account of the devastation of the plagues, she reminds her father that he only needs to accommodate Moses's demand and let his people go to restore order in Egypt. Asnath's plea is sung to lyrical music (13, 3rd staff) with a throbbing accompaniment, perhaps indicating that the princess retains a lingering affection for the man, Moses, whom she rescued as a baby.[22]

Miriam as a Strong Leader

In several musical works, Miriam is a central character. The best example is the opera *Il Mosè* (1905), by the Italian Jewish composer Giacomo Orefice (1865–1922).[23] In the opera Miriam remains on Moses's side as a powerful supporter who awakens his consciousness about the suffering of the Israelite people. She urges him to rebel while recounting how she and Jochebed placed him as a baby boy in the basket found by the Egyptian princess. This revelation spurs Moses to start his rebellion.[24] A dramatic mezzo-soprano sings Miriam, a voice that stands for age and authority. In the first act, she is re-united with Moses while they are

slaves in Egypt. Moses swears to protect her in memory of their joyful childhood. He also suggests that Miriam lived nearby while Moses grew up in the palace. The musical midrash gives Miriam a back-story that is absent in the biblical text where Miriam does not appear alongside the adult Moses in Egypt. Yet, in the opera, Miriam is an important character. When the Israelites lose faith in Moses during his long absence on the mountain, Miriam sings a rousing aria in which she berates the people for their lack of faith. She reminds them what Moses did for them. Thus, the operatic Miriam is fiercely proud of her brother, as well as a strong and confident leader of her people. She is even prescient. When the people doubt Moses's return, she reassures them that he will not only return, but he will also be "filled with the radiant splendor of the Infinite" and descend with the Law. In short, in *Il Mosè*, Miriam is a multi-dimensional female leader with a powerful voice. She is passionate, strong, warm, and loyal to her brother and her fellow Israelites.

In other operatic portrayals, Miriam's voice is mainly heard when she sings the Song at the Sea. (Exod. 15:1–18.20–21). The dramatic account of the Israelite crossing of the Reed Sea inspired many composers who tried to capture the excitement of the event with music representing rushing water, the pounding sounds of the approaching Egyptian army, the triumphant passing on dry ground, and the sheer thrill of the moment. Across eras, musical styles, and languages, composers brought the scene to life in astonishing ways. Many oratorios assign the bulk of the Song at the Sea to Miriam's voice, frequently in the brightest key of C major and often topped off by a ringing high C (c´´). This choice can probably be attributed more to the bright and clarion sound of a high soprano than to some previously undiscovered nineteenth-century feminist sentiments among composers and librettists. In addition to singing the song in full oratorios, some musical settings of Miriam's Song (Exod. 15.20–21) for soprano stand alone.

Two extensive concert arias are based on Miriam's Song. One, written by Franz Schubert (1797–1828), is called *Miriams Siegesgesang* or "Miriam's Victory Song."[25] It is set for soprano, chorus, and piano. The text for the Schubert song is a poem of the renowned Austrian poet, Franz Grillparzer. The poem conflates Exodus 14 and the Song at the Sea in Exod. 15: 1–18, 20–21 and it dramatically describes the experience of the Israelites at the Reed Sea. Schubert completed this aria in 1828, the year he died. The other concert aria was composed by Carl Reinecke (1824–1910). Also entitled as *Miriams Siegesgesang*, it was written in 1862 and set for soprano and orchestra (in contrast to the Schubert song, set for soprano, chorus, and piano). Apparently

Reinecke's aria was never recorded or published commercially. The text for the song is not attributed, but was probably written by the composer. The song can be heard on YouTube.[26] There are similarities and borrowings from Schubert's version and it features the voice of a powerful woman leader.

Finally, the eighteenth-century English composer Charles Avison (1709–70) wrote "Miriam's Song," a short song with text based almost literally on Exodus 15:21. in which Miriam praises God for the victory of the Israelites escaping Egypt.[27] The song stands in its own right and is not part of an oratorio. It is very bright, full of energy, and bursting with the joy of victory. Clearly, then, Miriam as a strong woman appealed to composers in every era, and their compositions reinforced this image with powerfully soaring music.

Michal as a Woman in Love

Michal appears in four episodes in the books of Samuel (1 Samuel 18–19; 2 Samuel 3 and 6), the first and last of which echo and also reverse each other. Michal acts and speaks in two scenes while she is silent and acted upon in the middle episodes. The parallels between the first and last episodes underline Michal's transformation from an independent woman who expresses her love for David to a bitter and neglected wife. She is verbal in many scenes, yet most of the time Michal's role is limited to expressing her feelings for David. In the first part of Michal's story, the term "love" appears three times at key moments. Scholars grapple with the question of why her love for David is important, and she is depicted as a devoted wife who renounces allegiance to her father out of devotion to her husband.

Librettists, however, feel no need to offer a motive for Michal's love. Making the love reciprocal, composers create lengthy and flowery love duets. In the 1865 oratorio *Saul*, composed by Ferdinand Hiller (1811–85),[28] Michal sings a lengthy aria in which she declares her love for David. Notably, Hiller cites and paraphrases verses from the Song of Songs. The music vividly portrays the excitement and passion of a woman in love. Song of Songs verses also appear in a duet between Michal and David in the oratorio *King Saul* (1894), composed by C. H. H. Parry (1848–1918).[29] The duet includes passionate musical depictions of their love in which their voices overlap, a musical feature that often insinuates an intimate connection. The couple sings consistently in a very high range, denoting ardor.[30] Love duets between David and Michal are part of most

oratorios and operas that feature Michal. To maintain an appropriately "biblical" feel, many borrow from the Song of Songs, the quintessential biblical expression of love and passion.

The only composer who deviates from this pattern is French Jewish composer Darius Milhaud (1892–1974) in his monumental opera *David* (1954).[31] The first scene in the third act portrays a dramatic scene of anticipation rather than love. Using 2 Sam. 3:12–13 as a reference, wherein David demands in his pact with Abner that Michal must be returned to him, Milhaud creates a reconciliation scene between Michal and David in the form of a duet. This fascinating piece of music frequently uses suspensions, i.e. unresolved chords leading to other unresolved chords that do not reach a resolution until the end of the section. This musical feature creates a sense of longing and anticipation.[32] Wistfulness, longing, and regret rather than love and passion characterize the mood in this musical work.

However, in a later scene Michal argues with David over his exhibitionist display during his dance in the ark's procession. She is angry about David's whirling dance (2 Sam. 6:16), which she expresses in harshly nagging and highly descriptive music. She is angry rather than deferential, and refers to David in the third person, with his public title rather than in personal terms. This portrayal of Michal suggests a fraught relationship with David. Her criticism of the king sounds petulant and exaggerated. David rejects her at the end of the scene, and she vanishes from the story. Milhaud's opera offers a more complex portrait of Michal than any other work in which she is featured. Yet, this opera also keeps David in the center, similarly to other large musical works about David's story that elevate and affirm his importance as the great king and unifier of Israel.

Bathsheba Re-imagined

Since lust serves as a primary theme in the story about David and Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:4), few musical works depict the biblical story. The incident appears in passing in a few oratorios, but Bathsheba never sings in them. However, many oratorios do mention Bathsheba when she becomes a mother. They feature her as fulfilling her womanly purpose in life, to live on through a son. One example is the opera entitled *David* 1954 by Darius Milhaud (discussed above), which treats Bathsheba's story extensively but does not include this particular passage. In the one-act opera *And David Wept*, American Jewish composer Ezra Laderman (previously discussed for his opera *Sarah*) provides a flashback retelling in

which Bathsheba is more lustful than David, a common misogynist view that blames the woman.

Milhaud's opera presents Bathsheba as a three-dimensional character. It omits the initial encounter between Bathsheba and David, but a lengthy duet in Act Four, Scene Two refers to it. In this scene, the couple's firstborn child is dying. Both Bathsheba and David express sadness and regret at what happened between them. Milhaud's stage notes advise that "tenderness should combine with despair." Musically, textually, and dramatically, this scene articulates the ambivalence and ambiguity of Bathsheba's feelings. The voices sing very different lines and phrases in the duet, implying a lack of connection. It is as if David and Bathsheba are not addressing each other but rather musing aloud. The end of the duet is musically unsettled and unresolved. Bathsheba exits while the concluding notes are still playing, but then re-enters screaming that the baby has died. Once again, Bathsheba has a more active role in the opera than in the biblical text, this time as a grieving mother. Unusually, she is not portrayed as a seductress, but rather as a three-dimensional woman with conflicting emotions.

The other opera featuring a multi-dimensional Bathsheba is Laderman's opera *And David Wept*. The singers alternately speak and sing their lines, and there is great variation between highly dissonant passages and accessible, almost Broadway-like tunes.[33] The story is told in flashback from the three different viewpoints of David, Bathsheba, and Uriah. The libretto, by Broadway lyricist Joe Darion, is original text. In this retelling Bathsheba is a seductress who takes the initiative from the start, deliberately trying to entice the innocent David. Her casting as a mezzo-soprano, representing maturity and seductiveness, reinforces this notion. Through various musical devices, Bathsheba is portrayed as a scheming woman, a classic misogynist view. Yet, Laderman's opera also gives Bathsheba some complexity when she sings about her unhappy marriage.[34] Perhaps the song is meant to deflect guilt from Bathsheba's scheming and adultery. Another unusual element is the opera's depiction of the older Bathsheba placing her son Solomon on the throne. Thinking back on her life with David, she comments: "I was his greatest blessing, and his greatest curse." Vast differences exist between the two operatic retellings by Milhaud and Laderman, but both of them bring Bathsheba vividly and imaginatively to life.

Hearing Their Stories in Music: A Conclusion

The analysis of biblical women in classical music settings demonstrates that the musical works move the selected biblical women from the background to the foreground. Female characters who are mostly marginalized and silent in the Bible come alive by experiencing love, disappointment, jealousy, grief, and anger. Unfortunately, some librettos and musical interpretations are as patriarchal and sexist as the biblical stories they retell. Tempting though it may be to criticize them for their androcentric notions, they should be seen in the context of their cultural setting. These works offer personal interpretation and not commentary. Cheryl Exum articulates the value of retellings in all artistic mediums when she states:

> The retelling is itself an interpretation of the text and deserves to be studied for its own particular insights into and its time-and-culture-bound perspective on the text. These insights and perspectives often can lead us to see something in the text we might have missed, or can help us appreciate the richness or complexity of the text, or encourage us to interrogate the text and its time-and-culture-bound perspective or agenda.[35]

Each composer wrote in a particular social and cultural milieu, what Exum calls the "time-and-culture-bound perspective."[36] All of them wanted their works to be performed and appreciated. Nonetheless, some of these musical interpretations may alter our attitudes toward biblical characters so that we rethink our assumptions. They give us a window into the reception of biblical women in different periods. Composers attempt to make a biblical stories relevant for their era, which explains the addition of piety to so many character depictions.

The study of musical settings of biblical women's stories is enriching because in music these characters transcend their source material, becoming more real than their narrative counterparts. Music offers a continual subtext, effectively filling the gaps between the lines or in the margins. Musical retellings offer silent women of the Bible a voice with which to express their own feelings. Emotions and motives are virtually never explored in biblical texts but they are examined and even highlighted in musical settings to create and sustain both dramatic and musical tension. In this way music not only places a new spotlight on the women but also offers many new lenses through which to see them.

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[1] This essay is based primarily on my scholarship on nineteenth- and twentieth-century opera, oratorio, and song settings of characters from the Hebrew Bible. Although I have worked in this area for twenty-five years, very few people have cross-trained in both musicology and biblical studies, particularly with a feminist focus. The area has thus remained small.

[2] *Abraham op. 8* (piano reduction) (Leipzig: Edition Breitkopf & Hartel: 1862).

[3] All page numbers refer to the score.

[4] I obtained both a recording of the television broadcast and a score from private collectors. Neither is available commercially.

[5] Helen Leneman, *Musical Illuminations of Genesis Narratives* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017).

[6] The composer graciously provided both the score and a recording. Neither of them is available commercially.

[7] Leneman, *Musical Illuminations*, 140.

[8] Leneman, *Musical Illuminations*, 121.

[9] I discussed this opera’s focus on motherhood as being of prime importance to both Sarah and Hagar with Gerald Cohen. He rightfully argued that this was the reality of the time and of women’s place in that society. To change this focus would be untrue to the biblical story. As with other composers (most of whom are no longer living and so unavailable for questioning), his goal was not to make a commentary on the low status of women, but to round out their portraits and create living, feeling women.

[10] Leneman, *Musical Illuminations*, 121–2.

[11] No score is available, but a recording can be heard on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2oGxEJBD9bI [accessed April 17, 2018].

[12] Leneman, *Musical Illuminations*, 165.

[13] Leneman, *Musical Illuminations*, 178.

[14] Other examples of this type-scene are Jacob’s meeting with Rachel (Gen. 29:1–14) and Moses’s meeting with Jethro’s daughters (Exod. 2:16–21).

[15] Ferdinand Hiller, *Rebecca* (Cöln: Alt & Uhrig; Leipzig: Friedrich Hofmeister, n.d.). No recording exists.

[16] [César Franck, *Rébecca: Scène Biblique* (Heugel & Cie. Editeurs; n.d.). A recording is available on

YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tdhPZOYsRLs [accessed April 25, 2018].

[17] Lieve Teugels, *Bible and Midrash: The Story of The Wooing of Rebekah* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 94.

[18] Leneman, *Musical Illuminations*, 219.

[19] *Rébecca: Oratorio* (Enoch Fres. & Costallat, Editeurs; n.d.).

[20] *Libretto: Hermann Mosenthal (1821–1877)* (Leipzig: Bartholf Senff, 1887). A fine recording was issued in 2018, with the Polish Sinfonia Juventus Orchestra and Warsaw Philharmonic Choir, conducted by Michael Jurowski.

[21] Helen Leneman, *Moses: The Man and the Myth in Music* (The Bible in the Modern World 61; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014).

[22] Leneman, *Moses*, 73–75.

[23] *Libretto: Angiolo Orvieto* (Milan: Sonzogno, 1905).

[24] Leneman, *Moses*, 87–90.

[25] For Schubert's first song, *Hagar's Lament*, see the earlier discussion in this essay.

[26] It is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MwKPkRziPVA [accessed on April 18, 2018].

[27] Helen Leneman, "Miriam Re-Imagined," in *Exodus to Deuteronomy: A Feminist Companion to the Bible* (Second Series), ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 134–51.

[28] *Libretto: Moritz Hartmann (1821–1872)* (Leipzig: Fr. Kistner, 1858).

[29] *Libretto: Biblical Text and Parry* (London / New York, NY: Novello, Ewer, 1894).

[30] Helen Leneman, *Love, Lust, and Lunacy: The Stories of Saul and David in Music* (The Bible in the Modern World 29; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010), 116–21.

[31] *Libretto: Armand Lunel* (Tel Aviv: Israeli Music Publications, 1954).

[32] For a complete discussion, see Leneman, *Love, Lust, and Lunacy*, 272–320.

[33] This opera was first performed live on CBS television in 1971, featuring a cast of well-known Metropolitan Opera stars, including the late mezzo-soprano Rosalind Elias (1930–2020) in a stunning performance.

[34] This interpretation was also found in the 1951 film David and Bathsheba, starring Gregory Peck and Susan Hayward, directed by Henry King with a screenplay by Philip Dunne.

[35] Cheryl Exum, ed., *Retellings: The Bible in Literature, Music, Art and Film* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), vii.

[36] Ibid.

CHAPTER 24

HAGAR IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY SOUTHERN WOMEN'S NOVELS

VANESSA L. LOVELACE

HAGAR has long held a place of affection in the lives of U.S.-American blacks in general and black women in particular. The tale of the enslaved and exploited Egyptian woman abandoned with her son in the wilderness (Genesis 16, 21) resonated with the descendants of Africans taken captive as forced labor and brought to the shores of America. Various representations of Hagar by African American artists give evidence of Hagar's place in the African American imagination. They include the short play "Hagar and Ishmael" (1913) by playwright Charlotte Teller Hirsch,[1] the serial novel *Hagar's Daughter: A Story of Southern Caste Prejudice* (1901–1902)[2] by Pauline Hopkins, and the marble sculpture *Hagar* (also known as *Hagar in the Wilderness*; 1875) by Edmonia Lewis, the first American woman sculptor of African and Indian ancestry.[3] According to Lewis's biography the sculpture was meant to represent Egypt as black Africa and Hagar as a "symbol of courage and the mother of a long line of African kings."[4] Lewis's depiction of Hagar and other ethnic subjects was rare for neoclassical sculptors of her time.

Like Lewis's sculpture, many African American artistic depictions of Hagar focus on the moment of her expulsion, often eliciting sympathy for the exiled mother and her son. This sentiment is captured in the final stanza of Eloise Bibb's poem "The Expulsion of Hagar" (1895):

> Alas! 'tis true, I see, I know,

> Thou meanest what thou sayest, I go;
> And Hagar ne'er shall smile again,
> No rippling laughter leave her lips.
> The saddest 'mongst the wives of men,
> Will e'er be she, who sorrow sips.
> My boy! my own! all, all is o'er,
> And we are outcasts ever more.[5]

Many of Bibb's writings stress the social equality and uplift of black people in the United States. There is little doubt that she viewed Hagar as a black character of similar significance to other black leaders featured in her work.

African American appropriations of Hagar as a black woman illustrate both the contextual nature of all biblical interpretation and the efforts by blacks to restore Hagar and Egypt to the continent of Africa. For more than two centuries the field of Egyptology denied the African origins of Egyptians by classifying Egypt and Egyptians as Asiatic.[6] Yet Greco-Roman and early Christian writers often associated Egyptians and Egypt, as well as Ethiopians and Ethiopia with "Blacks/blackness." For example, Gay Byron quotes the ancient Greek historian Herodotus, who described the Colchians as "an Egyptian race . … My own conjectures were founded, first, on the fact that they are black-skinned and have wooly hair."[7] Even during the antebellum period black and white Americans took for granted that the enslaved Egyptian, Hagar, was black whereas her Israelite mistress, Sarah, was white. For instance, the nineteenth-century American evangelical novelist Susan Warner depicts Hagar as lifting her "pretty black head high" in defiance of her mistress.[8] For U.S.-American blacks, the recognition that the Egyptian Hagar is "black" lifted their status as descendants of enslaved Africans. For nineteenth-century white feminist novelists living in the U.S.-American south, Hagar represents a different form of enslavement and freedom.

This essay examines depictions of Hagar in three so-called domestic novels published between 1820 and 1882.[9] They are *The Deserted Wife* written by Emma Dorothy Eliza Nevitte (E. D. E. N.) Southworth (1850),[10] *Hagar the Martyr* written by Harriet Marion Stephens (1855), and *The Modern Hagar* written by Charlotte Moon Clark (1882).[11] Southworth wrote one the first novels of this genre, and so her *The Deserted Wife* set the standard for nineteenth-century domestic fiction. Importantly, Southworth, Stephens, and Clark imagined the protagonist's life beyond the conventional expectations of southern womanhood. Their main character is always a woman who rejects conventional constraints, although all three writers also defended the notion of "True

Womanhood." Before further details on the essay's structure will be mentioned, the next section outlines some general features of domestic literature on Hagar in the nineteenth-century United States.

Some General Features of "Domestic" Novels on Hagar

A popular American literary genre during the nineteenth century was "domestic" or "sentimental" fiction. A number of writers featured a female protagonist named Hagar, a racialized character. Interestingly, domestic fiction was written largely by southern middle-class white women. They were among the most frequent writers of novels that present Hagar as a white or ambiguously white character. For instance, Harriet Marion Stephens's novel, titled *Hagar the Martyr*, highlights a white female protagonist named Hagar whose racial purity is placed in doubt.[12] In addition to including the distinctive feature of racialized heroines named Hagar, literary critic, Jane Tompkins, explains that female writers wrote "tearful stories about orphan girls whose Christian virtue triumphed against all odds."[13] Some of the novels were intended to effect right action among their readers. For example, in 1852, Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote one of the most popular works of domestic fiction, titled *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, to support the abolitionist movement.[14] Stowe likens the institution of slavery to a disorderly kitchen, and so her abolitionist position needs to be understood as defense of domesticity. Gillian Brown explains that Stowe's "call to the mothers of America for the abolition of slavery is a summons to fortify the home, to rescue domesticity from shiftlessness and slavery."[15] It is worth noting that one of Stowe's symbols for slavery's disruption to domesticity is the separation of an enslaved African woman named Aunt Hagar from her son, Albert, by slave traders.

Despite appealing to emotion, domestic fiction by female writers also expressed anti-sentimental yearnings, such as featuring a female protagonist who rejects the image of the pious exemplar of high moral standards to succeed on her own terms. Several novels that feature Hagar as a protagonist illustrate this point. The decision to name their characters after the biblical figure signals to the reader that the heroine operates outside the accepted expectations of white middle-class women. Many nineteenth-century white female writers heard as children the story of the runaway slave. Although some female readers assumed

that Hagar should return to her mistress Sarah because of her duty as a servant, many others sided with Hagar, the mother exiled with her child. They often spoke of Hagar with kindness. While Sarah was the model for white southern women, Hagar "was weak, despised and vulnerable, embodying what many nineteenth-century women experienced."[16] Female domestic-fiction writers benefited from having a ready-made character whose status as an outsider allowed them to portray her as an unconventional woman. Literary critic, Elaine Showalter, observes that "'Hagar' was the standard American name for the heroine as an outcast or fallen woman betrayed by men."[17] For instance, in the novel *The Modern Hagar*, Hagar Martin's pristine reputation is sullied by a disreputable man.

Since domestic fiction arose during a period of growing discourse about the true nature and place of "Woman" in society, some domestic fiction writers accepted the dominant viewpoint that a woman's character is inherently different from a man's character. They also believed that women were weaker, purer, more spiritual, and more suited for the domestic sphere. These assumptions help explain the domestic settings stressed in these novels. Historian Barbara Welter refers to them as part of the "Cult of True Womanhood," which is also known as the "cult of domesticity," popular from 1820 to 1860.[18] As these assertions became embedded in American society with the assistance of countless women's magazines, gift annuals, religious literature, and sermons, the notion of "True Womanhood" came to define notions of femininity. It championed four cardinal virtues to which "true women" should aspire: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity.[19]

Certainly, enslaved black women and poor and working-class white women were excluded from needing to attain these virtues. As literary critic, Susan Hill Lindley, notes: "The image of women's nature and sphere assumed by proponents of the cult to be 'universal' simply wasn't. Many American women faced practical social and economic barriers that precluded their achievement of True Womanhood."[20] Since domestic fiction reflected the lives of middle-class women in the South and the industrialized North only, women writers of Hagar domestic fiction both challenged and maintained the notion of "True Womanhood" in their novels.

Domestic fiction on Hagar follows a standard formula. It includes a total of four elements, but the first three also appear in other novels of this genre. The first element focuses on the separation of the young female protagonist from her mother or from both parents by death or other circumstances.[21] The second element deals with her lack of parental protection and guidance in the ways of

"True Womanhood," leaving her vulnerable to unscrupulous and sometimes abusive male suitors or other adversaries, sometimes other women. Yet the main character's difficulties in life also develop her character as she discovers her inner strength. The third element presents the young woman as overcoming several challenges and as eventually settling into a stable life in the domestic sphere, usually as the wife of a respectable man. The fourth element that is unique to the selected novels of this study racializes the main character as a black woman, justifying the heroine's unconventional behavior.[22]

The four elements structure the analysis of this essay. One section examines how the main character is depicted as an orphaned or abandoned heroine lacking maternal support. Another section investigates how the three novels present the heroine as being endangered by unscrupulous or even dangerous adversaries. Yet another section scrutinizes how the three novels characterize the heroine as finding purpose or redemption in a domestic existence. Still another section analyzes how the novels racialize the main character's appearance to explain her non-social conforming behavior. The conclusion considers why nineteenth-century white women domestic writers depicted the main character of their novels, to varying degrees, as a black woman called Hagar.

Element 1: The Orphaned or Abandoned Heroine Lacking Maternal Support

The first element depicts the female protagonist as an orphan or abandoned heroine, resulting from the death of one or both parents. This situation causes the protagonist to experience economic and emotional hardship. According to literary critic, Nina Baym, the heroine often starts out as a "poor and friendless child" or she is a spoiled mid-adolescent heiress who becomes poor and friendless "through the death or financial failure of her legal protectors."[23] For example, Southworth's *The Deserted Wife* features two female protagonists who are orphaned as infants. One of them is Hagar Churchill who is the only daughter of Ignatius and Agatha Churchill. The infant is named for her mother but nicknamed Hagar because she is a "wild, dark beauty."[24] Tragically, the mother, Agatha, dies after giving birth to Hagar, and her father is overcome with grief and dies within the year, leaving Hagar orphaned. Southworth mentions before his death that Ignatius is the last heir of the Churchills, an aristocratic family that had lost a once magnificent estate.[25] Ignatius has two sisters, Rosalie

and Sophie. The elder Rosalie marries and moves with her husband to Baltimore, which leaves 1-year-old Hagar in the care of her 17-year-old aunt, Sophie. Soon thereafter, Rosalie (now Rosalia) and her husband die in a flu epidemic. Their daughter, Rosalia, also becomes an orphan and Sophie takes care of her also. Since the girls lack money for food and heating and the female house slave is too old to be of much assistance, the young girls must become self-reliant. The heroine's portrayal as deprived of her mother and financial support hints at the extent to which she will have to overcome hardship and achieve success at the end of the story.[26]

While the stories of heroines who are orphaned or separated from their mothers often allude to the biblical story of Hagar, Charlotte Moon Clark associates her protagonist directly with the biblical character. In *The Modern Hagar*, the enslaved woman, Lucy, is the Hagar figure. She is the mother of Mai Hilton, who is taken from Lucy as an infant. Mai's father, Captain Wenner Hartley, tells her that her mother is dead, but in truth he stole her from Lucy because he did not want Mai "brought up as the child of a quadroon—of a slave."[27] Lucy had been found abandoned as a child in a cemetery and sold to the Leszinkskys. When they fall on hard times they sell her to Hartley who promises in writing that he would free Lucy and provide for her financially. Instead, he steals her manumission papers and their child and sells Lucy into slavery. When Mr. Leszinksky becomes aware of Hartley's betrayal he charges him with denying Lucy the supreme right that gave Ishmael to Hagar: "You have been more pitiless than the law. You forced the child from the arms of the mother; and sent Hagar into the wilderness to die alone. Lest she should cry out in her agony, should show the world the spectacle of her bleeding heart, you *sold her as a slave*" (emphasis original).[28] In other words, Clark places Hagar's story within the context of nineteenth-century U.S. slavery.

The element of the orphaned protagonist goes back to the biblical story although mother and child are exiled there in contrast to the novel in which only the female protagonist is exiled. Nonetheless, the allusion to Hagar elicits readerly sympathy. Literary critic, Elizabeth Kraft, asserts that "there is much evidence that Hagar and her son are the favored characters in a sentimental reading of the narrative in which they appear"[29] due to their ability to evoke readerly compassion. Thus, readers desire to step in and protect the characters. At the same time the image of the abandoned wife and mother also alludes to Hagar's rejection by Abraham. The connection may even comfort readers who are familiar with the biblical story, as they know that Hagar and Ishmael's expulsion does not lead to death but to their eventual survival. The novels thus

appropriate the biblical heroine, Hagar, in complex and complicated ways that are similar and different from the biblical tale.

Element 2: A Vulnerable Heroine Endangered by Unscrupulous or Dangerous Adversaries

The second element features a Hagar-like protagonist who is endangered by unscrupulous or even dangerous adversaries, as she lacks parental protection and guidance in the ways of "True Womanhood." A commonly featured adversary is the unprincipled suitor who sexually pursues the female protagonist. Often the pursuit borders on the sadistic. The plotline is predictable: A virtuous female protagonist is poised to marry the ideal romantic partner when an undesirable male suitor circumvents the union. The male protagonist relentlessly stalks the young woman with the goal to "tame," "subdue," or "domesticate" her. After a series of complications, "piety, intelligence and initiative enable [the women] to overcome cruel and immoral adversaries and they become exemplars of 'true womanhood,'"[30] either in marriage or by self-sacrifice.

Several examples illustrate this standard element in the novels. According to literary critic, Kristina Groover, the novelist Southworth favored the plotline of a female protagonist being wooed by a cruel suitor. Groover explains: "Nearly all of her diverse and colorful heroines are beset by cruel and self-centered men: greedy fathers, opportunistic suitors, and selfish husbands."[31] For instance, in *The Deserted Wife*, Hagar Churchill's guardian, Sophie, is a protagonist who is forced into marriage with the ruthless Reverend John Withers. At the start of the story Sophie is smitten with her friend Emily's brother, Augustus Wilde, whose feelings for Sophie are mutual. However, Withers, the new minister in Sophie's parish, has taken a liking to her. When Emily tells Sophie that Withers wishes to marry Sophie, she exclaims: "I have such an antipathy to him—such a sickening, deadly antipathy to him."[32] Later Withers hires Sophie to be the parish schoolteacher. Under the guise of tutoring her, he makes regular nightly visits to the home of the unchaperoned young woman, with only the child, Hagar, and the elderly slave woman, Cumbo, as her companions. He deliberately creates the appearance of impropriety to force Sophie to marry him or be branded as a woman of ill-repute in the county. Sophie, an orphan due to the early death of her parents, fits the pattern of the young female protagonist who is left

vulnerable without the benefit of parental guidance and protection. She protests that she has no desire to marry him. Instead of being repelled, he acknowledges that he is quite flattered by her aversion to him. He asks rhetorically if she does not know that "there is an instinct in human nature—to speak more correctly, in *man's* nature, or in speaking *most* correctly, perhaps I should say in my *own* nature—to pursue that which flies?"[33] In short, Withers represents the typical cruel suitor in domestic fiction. Male suitors pursue women who are not attracted to them. Yet often these stories depict the men favorably. In *The Deserted Wife* Sophie becomes even interested in Withers when she learns about an illness he kept a secret, but in turn he loses interest in her.

Whereas in *The Deserted Wife* Withers's cruelty toward Sophie entertains him, in the other two novels the male villains pursue the female protagonists for other reasons. They want to catch and tame the fiery young woman. For instance, in Stephens's novel, *Hagar the Martyr*, the villain Michael Laird pursues the feisty Hagar Martin to gain control over her. When she responds with spirited protests to his advances, he is immediately drawn to the pursuit of taming and marrying her. As they size up one another in their initial encounter, he asks if Hagar likes what she sees. She replies she has never seen a face that she likes less and that she prays that she will never be attracted to him. He responds:

> You *do* already attract me. I repel you, that is evident; you recoil from me! *Take care*! There is an instinct—a natural enough instinct—implanted in every heart to hunt that which flies from us. The excitement of the chase you know. Now, I possess more than my share of this instinct. Hagar, if I choose to wind my will around your repugnance, you could no more elude my grasp than you can free yourself from this arm till I choose to release you.[34]

Like Withers, Laird does not only relish in her repulsion, but he also encourages it when he proclaims: "What a singular, provocative little vixen you are Hagar! And what a time I shall have in taming you—when we are married."[35] Sometimes, the male villain resorts to physical coercion to possess and tame the woman. Feminist critic, Janice Raymond, citing the classic *Taming of the Shrew* by Shakespeare, explains this dynamic: "The stories of women who are tamed by men are a standard stereotype in literature and in movies."[36] Accordingly, the domestication of the wild or strong-willed woman is frequently "flavored by a slap or two, a good spanking, or a seduction laden with violence" at the hand of a boorish husband or lover even though their efforts are not always met with success.[37]

Such is the case as Laird fails to acquire Hagar Martin. However, Raymond

Withers, son of John Withers and Hagar Churchill's self-centered husband in *The Deserted Wife*, is more successful. After wooing Hagar for years, Withers is successful eventually. The "wild, free maiden"[38] relents but he then seeks to break her like a wild animal. The younger Withers is physically and emotionally abusive, as when he sells Hagar's beloved horse and dogs in retribution for her perceived insolence toward him. As she protests, he holds her tightly until she gives in to him. As she acquiesces, he responds: "Come, love, you are a spirited little thing, but you will be docile by and by, and then."[39] For Janice Raymond, men need to tame women because rebellious womanhood goes against the male hetero-reality of women dependent on men. Raymond observes that men tame women to deprive them of their "original wild selves," thus creating "man-made women."[40] This is how the lives of the primary female protagonists in the three novels turn out. They find purpose and fulfillment in their tamed and domesticated existence.

Element 3: A Heroine Finding Purpose or Redemption in Domesticated Existence

The third element depicts the female protagonist as finding purpose in her life or as being otherwise redeemed from waywardness, often in the domestic sphere as a wife, mother, or martyr. The three novels rely on this element in various ways. For example, Southworth's Hagar overcomes her abandonment as an infant and an early childhood as an untrained girl to eventually becoming a model wife and mother. This trajectory is not without tension. As mentioned above, Hagar novelists often presented the female protagonist in challenge to the conventional standards for white middle-class women of their time. Thus, Hagar Churchill is celebrated for rebuffing efforts at taming her wild, unbound spirit, but her story also follows the genre's formula of ending with the heroine's triumph over her obstacles as a way to show her as having finally become a respectable woman in the domestic setting. In Hagar's case, this tension requires her to settle into domesticity with her penitent husband Raymond and their children, while Southworth challenges the idea that submission brings happiness.

Southworth demonstrates the point by showing that rather than being rewarded for her submission to Raymond, Hagar is blamed for the troubles in her marriage. For example, she is portrayed as selfish for not bending to her husband's will, even though he sometimes uses force and emotional abuse to get

her to respond to his command. On one occasion he takes her newborn twins and gives them to a wet nurse because Hagar's breastfeeding interferes with their conjugal relations. Hagar is also depicted with a jealous spirit since childhood, which grows as Raymond's emotional abuse distances him from her. When her cousin Rosalia visits the couple to brighten Raymond's spirits, the narrator faults Hagar's jealously with putting the idea of turning to Rosalia for comfort into Raymond's head.[41] As a result, Hagar is blamed when he accepts a consulate position in Europe and abandons a pregnant Hagar and their twin daughters, taking Rosalia with him. Yet, instead of sitting home alone and despairing, Hagar packs her things and heads for the comfort of her childhood home. She reaches within herself to discover that she has a gift for singing. She becomes a famous opera singer, enabling her to provide financially for herself and her family.

By the end of this novel, the girl who left Heath Hall poor and destitute becomes a refined woman who receives the social approval of her neighbors. Literary critic, Susan Harris, explains that Southworth has used the biblical Hagar for her protagonist's advantage when she states: "While Hagar's name is clearly meant to signal the concubine Abraham cast out on his wife's bidding, rather than retelling the biblical story of a woman permanently rejected by the established powers, Southworth recasts her Hagar's tale into the story of a woman who returns to become the source of power."[42] The girl who was rejected by her community and abandoned by her husband is welcomed back as a respected woman. Hagar claims the higher moral ground when Raymond's European plans fall apart. As he returns and pleads for Hagar's forgiveness, she grants it. Kristina Groover describes the redemption of Raymond as Southworth's attempt to reform men, depicting the ideal man as one who "recognizes, appreciates, and respects her superior virtue and values and takes his rightful place in a domestic realm dominated by her."[43] Groover is perhaps referring to the fact that Raymond admits to his wrongdoing when he returns to Hagar. However, perhaps Raymond's remorse reflects Southworth's own desire. After all, her own husband abandoned her and their children, and perhaps she hoped he would recognize her dignity and worth and return home. Overall, however, for both Southworth and Hagar, the home is the desired and dignified space for a woman. Hagar finds fulfillment when she gains control of her desires, which according to Harris, leads to the "judicious use of her will and consequent power over her environment."[44]

While Hagar Churchill exemplifies the heroine, who achieves fulfillment by learning to master self-control over her free-willing spirit and by earning the

admiration of her critics and adversaries, the female protagonist in *Hagar the Martyr* depicts a young heiress whose fortunes reverse upon the death of a parent or guardian, loses her innocence in a moment of weakness, but finds redemption in domesticity. In the case of Hagar Martin, her unwanted suitor Michael Laird drives her to forsake the virtue of purity. When all his other efforts to entice her fail, he reveals that her beloved fiancé Walter is engaged to marry his employer's daughter. The shock causes Hagar to fall into depression, and she becomes the lover of a man who uses his guile to attract her. Barbara Welter explains that antebellum women's magazines often described purity as an essential attribute of True Womanhood. Women were expected to securely guard it. Thus, "to contemplate such a loss of purity brought tears; to be guilty of such a crime … brought madness or death."[45] For Hagar, it causes her to go insane. When she finally returns to her senses she discovers that she has given birth to a daughter.

Soon the child dies and Hagar buries her shame of having borne a child out of wedlock with the burial of the infant. She rehabilitates herself as a successful writer and is reunited with Walter. He proposes marriage numerous times and is rejected each time because her past life haunts her. After several events threaten to keep the couple apart forever, Walter and Hagar finally marry and settle into domestic life. Life ends well for the two white Hagar-like figures. However, the slave woman Lucy, the Hagar figure in *The Modern Hagar* who is cast out by her owner's wife when she is discovered as being secretly held in the couple's home, finds her life's purpose not through securing a husband (although she does) by suppressing her desires but by a higher self-sacrifice. She withholds from her child the love of a mother. After Lucy had Mai, the infant taken from her, she is reunited with the young woman, Mai. However, she relinquishes any claim to being Mai's biological mother to protect Mai from being enslaved if her African ancestry were to be exposed.

Clark employs the "tragic mulatto" trope by portraying Mai as the unsuspecting offspring of a black slave woman and white slave owner. When Mai discovers her true identity, she wants to die rather than have the truth be known. She responds to Lucy: "I believe you are my mother, but I will not live to acknowledge it. If you prove this disgrace upon me you will drive me to my death."[46] Lucy promises to keep her secret. Thus, each heroine of these novels and other Hagar-inspired domestic fiction fulfills her purpose in life by performing acts of selflessness. By putting the needs and desires of others above her own, she is placed on a higher moral plane than her adversaries, especially the male protagonists. Yet, instead of being pitied, she is shown to have inner

strength that permits her to wield informal power in the domestic sphere.

Element 4: Racial Ambiguity Explaining Her Unconventional Behavior

The fourth and final element used in the domestic novels portrays the main female character in racialized ways. The element of racializing the female protagonist as black always serves to explain her nonconformity to nineteenth-century, middle-class gender norms. In the early developmental stage of this genre the female protagonist's racial identity is ambiguous, but over time the depiction of her racial identity moves from symbolically to literally black. This increased racialization of the Hagar character may reflect the desire to boost magazine and book sales by exploiting the sensationalism of inferring a racial blemish on the female protagonist's bloodline. Accordingly, the racialization of the heroine progresses from an allusion to blackness in *The Deserted Wife* to Hagar's insinuated black identity in *Hagar the Martyr* to a fully black Hagar who passes as white in *The Modern Hagar*. Interestingly, the domestic novels could not avoid the racialization of the literary Hagar. Although she is often depicted as white and as a member of the upper class, her name is identical with the enslaved Egyptian woman of the biblical tale. To nineteenth-century southern women readers, who wished of a life free of societal constraints, the depiction of Hagar as dark and wild was exotic, attractive, and erotic. The regular use of phrases such as "wild dark girl"[47] and "wild, untamable" appealed to their desires for social freedom. For example, literary critic, Katharine Ing explains that Southworth's use of "blackness" expresses "rebellion against the more passive and static 'true womanhood.'"[48] Likewise, literary critic, Janice Raymond, maintains that female writers of the nineteenth century often articulated their hope for freedom from social restrictions by writing about wild and racialized women. They emphasized these women's joy of nature in particular, as nature signified freedom from social conventions and expectations. Accordingly, "[t]he quest for Self in much literature written by women has been intimately bound with nature."[49] In the case of the three domestic novels, Hagar's affinity with nature characterizes her as stereotypically black in the nineteenth-century white imagination. As political activist and ecowomanist Shamara Riley observes: "From slavery to the present day, the Black female body has been seen in Western eyes as the quintessential symbol of a 'natural'

female presence that is organic, closer to nature, animalistic, primitive."[50] Riley's statement helps to explain why the novels associate Hagar's darkness with being comfortable in nature.

Although the designation of Hagar as "dark" and "wild" does not explicitly ascribe race to the female character, the novels make sure to attribute African ancestry to her. For instance, the story line of *The Deserted Wife* begins by describing an ill-mannered, untamed girl whose name alludes to the Egyptian slave woman, Hagar, who in the novel's end is a civilized, tamed young woman. When young Hagar Churchill appears as a "dark" and "wild" orphan who takes to nature "as the squirrel takes to the trees,"[51] she fits the stereotype of an infantilized black slave who needs guidance and protection. Yet she is the perfect wife after her marriage. Having finally acquired the virtues of piety, submission, and domesticity, Hagar is fully integrated into society. Thus, by the novel's end she is no longer associated with blackness, but she is a cultured woman according to the ideals of nineteenth-century middle-class white womanhood. In the other novel, titled *Hagar the Martyr*, the author Harriet Marion Stephens goes even further. She associates the protagonist's name with "the outcast Hagar of the wilderness,"[52] but the writer also explicitly refers to the main character's African ancestry and blackness. The story suggests that the female protagonist, Hagar Martin, is the biological daughter of her mother's personal slave, Minnie, a "quadroon" or a person with one-fourth African ancestry. In fact, her mother confesses on her deathbed that Hagar is not her biological daughter. She dies at the very moment as she is about to reveal the identity of Hagar's biological mother. While the other slaves wonder aloud who her biological mother is, Minnie looks on knowingly. Stephens exploits racial anxiety of nineteenth-century white readers by describing Minnie as an quadroon who does not look "black," but is "as white as her mistress [Hagar]."[53] While this detail explains why Hagar passes as white, the allusion to the biblical figure also explains her attraction to the solitude of the outdoors.

Yet, as the plot progresses, the connection between Hagar's racial identity and her love for nature has even more serious racial implications. Since the novels are set in the antebellum South prior to or during the Civil War, the writers knew the social dangers of mixed-race sexual relations between white and black people. They recognized that this kind of plotline piqued the interests of their readers. Not only was intermarriage between whites and non-whites illegal in the United States at the time, but U.S.-Southern colonies and state governments began to legalize the social rule called the "one-drop rule" or "hypodescent" from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century. This rule assigned

to children of interracial unions the racial status of the subordinate group. The rule also ensured that the race of the mother superseded the race of the child. Accordingly, Stephens's Hagar would be categorized as black if it were proved that Minnie was her mother. Hagar's racial ambiguity and the plotline's suspense strategy of delaying the disclosure of the main character's true racial identity kept readers hooked to read on.

Unsurprisingly, the use of secrecy and disclosure in the plotline was a favorite literary device in nineteenth-century domestic novels. Literary critic, Leila May defines "secrecy" as "the action of withholding information from others who would enjoy or otherwise benefit from the discovery of the information or objects that are hidden."[54] She argues that Victorian fiction writers were obsessed with keeping and revealing secrets. The tantalizing dangling of the truth was so alluring because it "allow[ed] us to engage vicariously in that most delicious of forbidden pleasures: unveiling the secrets of others."[55] The strategy is masterfully employed in the domestic novels discussed here. For instance, Stephens turns up the suspense when she discloses that Laird, the villain, has proof that Minnie is Hagar's real mother. He uses this information to blackmail Hagar into marrying him and threatens her to have her enslaved if she rebuffs his affections. He insists that her facial features betray her racial identity. For instance, Stephens makes him say: "Take feature after feature of that superb face. Examine them individually—the luscious lips, the high cheek bone, the broad, low forehead, the unshapely nose—all bright, gorgeous, and fascinating *together*, but apart and distinct, undeniably African."[56] The novel depicts Hagar's dramatic response. She collapses on the sofa and exclaims: "Oh to be a child of shame—and *such* shame. *Now* I know what she meant in dying. A *slave*! O, ignominy! O, degradation! Where, where shall I hide my head?"[57] Stephens stokes real fear in her white women readers that despite their physical appearance they, too, could be taken into slavery if their racial identity were to get classified as ambiguous enough to merit legal persecution. Nevertheless, as long as a shadow of doubt remains about Hagar's African ancestry, Hagar is accepted as a white woman despite her name, her "wild" ways, and her affinity for nature. However, once she is "proven" to have African ancestry she is no longer eligible to be held to the standard of True Womanhood. Thus, readers are not surprised when Hagar behaves uncharacteristically of women of her social stature.

Stephens prolongs the resolution of Hagar's identity to the novel's very end. After Laird discovers Hagar's whereabouts and when he arrives at her residence to take her into custody, she confesses to being a slave telling her fiancé with

dramatic flair, "'Tis true, Walter—I have expected this for years."[58] At this moment an unidentified white woman steps forward to disclose that she is Hagar's real mother. She explains that she was Hagar's father Alva's unwed sister, who gave Hagar to her brother and his wife to give her a proper upbringing. Laird recognizes the woman as Hagar's real mother, thus giving up his claim on her. Accordingly, Hagar's "blackness" no longer poses legal jeopardy for her, but the disclosure of her racial identity also confines her to the metaphorical enslavement to domesticity and submission as a middle-class white woman.

While Southworth and Stephens's Hagar-like figures are white women with racially ambiguous characteristics, the African ancestry of Lucy's daughter Mai Hilton in Clark's novel is known to the readers and a few characters only. Thus, the protagonist is depicted as unwittingly passing as white throughout the entire novel. Literary critic, Elaine Ginsberg describes passing in the context of American racial identity politics as the "assumption of a fraudulent 'white' identity by an individual culturally and legally defined as 'Negro' or black by virtue of a percentage of African ancestry."[59] The secrecy of Mai's racial identity depends on the discretion of those in the know to keep this information hidden from the public. By protecting Mai, those around her allow her to escape the "subordination and oppression accompanying one identity … accessing the privileges and status of the other."[60] A dramatic scene exposes the fallacy of white and black racial consignment. Guests at Mai's aunt Julia's home debate Mai's racial identity in her absence. While most of the guests defend her whiteness on the grounds of her physical appearance, which the novel depicts as conforming to the white standards of physical beauty, a slave owner among the guests insists that there is a perceptible "taint of the African" in Mai and, if given the chance, he could prove it by examining her nail color and the "undivided cartilage of her nose."[61] Yet none of the guests dare subject the "beauty" to the test. Mai's pedigree and physical appearance "freed the child from apparent taint of mixed blood."[62]

In other words, in nineteenth-century domestic novels blackness is complicated. On the one hand, the authors depicted society's expectations of "True Womanhood" as a slave-like condition in white women's lives. For instance, Southworth considered women's submission to men as a form of enslavement, when she speaks through Hagar's words in response to Raymond: "I am not a slave, to come at your beck!"[63] On the other hand, the white nineteenth-century writers were not really interested in depicting the exploitation experienced by enslaved black women of their era. Enslaved black women were

secondary to them even when they rejected the evils of slavery. Hagar served to articulate their views about their own lives, and the articulated racial anxiety of the female protagonist was about the white identity of the female writers rather than about enslaved black women of their time.

Hagar's Blackness and White Women Writers: Concluding Comments

The three novels, written by white nineteenth-century female writers, are part of a brief and highly successful genre that attracted countless white women readers. They enjoyed reading about a dark, high-spirited young female protagonist named Hagar during the antebellum South. This character also captured the readerly imagination due to the four elements that play such a central role in these novels. They include the heroine having been abandoned or orphaned as a girl, her endangerment by unscrupulous suitors or ruthless adversaries, the quest for finding her life's purpose in domesticity after overcoming many challenges, and her racialization as a black woman. These four elements evoked sympathy for the rejected and rebellious young heroine and they also symbolized her freedom from societal gender expectations that white, middle-class women readers of the nineteenth-century United States longed for. Yet the depiction of the main female character as rebellious was a double-edged sword for the readers. While her rebellion was possibly a source of pride to them, her ambiguously characterized African ancestry elicited feelings of despair and rejection. In those novels, thus, the biblical Hagar serves an ambiguous literary purpose that is very different from how black Americans have viewed her throughout the ages. To them, her blackness is a reminder of their history of enslavement which turned them and their children into chattel to be bought and sold, sexually exploited, and subjected to second-class citizenship, just like this biblical woman.

The womanist theologian, Delores S. Williams observed this dynamic in African-American appropriation of Hagar when she classifies the African-American interpretation history as a "Hagar-centered tradition."[64] Thus, womanist and black feminist scholars like Hagar because she enables them to analyze the intersection of gender, race, and class, whereas nineteenth-century white women writers depict Hagar in white sentimental ways in which "'only whiteness' connotes genuine morality."[65] To the latter, the Hagar character

signifies freedom from societal gender expectations without challenging the racialized order of their world. To some feminist literary critics, such as Tompkins, the novels thus are "remarkable for [their] intellectual complexity, ambition, and resourcefulness; and that, in certain cases, [they] offer a critique of American society far more devastating than some of their acclaimed male contemporary writers."[66] Yet the novels are not concerned with nineteenth-century black women in the United States and their experiences of enslavement and discrimination. The heroine, even when she is imagined as black in the novels, is depicted as evolving from a wild, dark, and rebellious adolescent into a domesticated, submissive, and ideal woman. In this depiction she does not only illustrate that black women ought to rise to these standards of womanhood, but she also demonstrates that white women do not compare to her standard of true womanhood. In the end, then, the Hagar character of this genre of novels fails both black and white women in the nineteenth-century United States. All of them are inadequate when they are compared to this literary female protagonist. They need to aspire to being revered for their piety, submission, and resourcefulness, just like Hagar in these novels.

Another interesting cross-religious observation about the Hagar figure presented in the nineteenth-century domestic novels must be highlighted. Hagar is valued in the three traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It indicates that this female character does not belong to any particular racial, ethnic, or even religious group. While Jewish and Christian readers in the West are probably most familiar with Hagar by reading the Bible, she is also an important figure in Islam. She is called Hajar there and revered for her piety, submission, and resourcefulness. I thus wonder for whom Hagar will be a symbol in the future, as she will certainly be a figure of fascination for future generations. Perhaps future novels, written by ethnically, racially, and religiously diverse authors, will offer more universalizing stories about this female character that provided such considerable emotional, social, and literary stimulation in the past. As womanist and feminist biblical scholars, we should keep our eyes open for those works so that we keep abreast on the ongoing interpretation histories beyond the narrow confines of biblical studies.

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CHAPTER 25

BATHSHEBA IN CONTEMPORARY ROMANCE NOVELS

SARA M. KOENIG

The Hebrew Bible includes little information on Bathsheba. She appears in seventy-six verses and four chapters as the subject of only thirty-three verbs and speaker of only 103 words.[1] In contrast, post-biblical receptions develop her character much further. They fill in the textual gaps about her motivations, her thoughts, and her feelings. Fictional novels are thus an important genre in Bathsheba's reception history. They devote hundreds of pages to this biblical woman, even when they focus on King David. Despite the lavish attention given to Bathsheba, readers, especially feminist readers, want more from the novelistic characterizations of Bathsheba.[2] This desire stems from the fact that as the novels fill in the gaps about Bathsheba, they limit the possibilities for thinking about her character. For instance, 2 Sam. 11:4 only mentions that "Bathsheba came" to David, without specifying her motivation. Several novelists depict her unabashedly as a seductress, one who is eager to have sex with the most powerful man in the land. These novelists embellish her story by inventing her responses, by involving her in intricate conversations, and by placing her into stereotypical gender positions.

This essay examines the intersection of Bathsheba's appearance in eleven romance novels published between 1946 and 2016. The selected novels come from different fictional genres. Three novels represent themselves as Christian fiction. They are Roberta Door's *Bathsheba*, published in 1980, Francine Rivers's *Unspoken: Bathsheba*, published in 2001, and Jill Eileen Smith's

Bathsheba: A Novel, published in 2011.[3] Two novels borrow features from the Bathsheba narrative. They are Madeleine L'Engle's *Certain Women*, published in 1993, and Jack Englehard's *The Bathsheba Deadline*, published in 2007. Both books refer explicitly to the Bible but are set in the contemporary world, with storylines that emphasize this modern setting.[4] The remaining six novels are set in the biblical period. Listed in the chronological order of the publication years, the six novels are Gladys Schmitt's *David the King*, published in 1946, Stefan Heym's *The King David Report*, published in 1973, Joseph Heller's *God Knows*, published in 1984, Allan Massie's *King David*, published in 1995, Geraldine Brooks's *The Secret Chord*, published in 2015, and Yochi Brandes's *The Secret Book of Kings*, published in 2016. Ten of the eleven novels are originally written in English; Brandes's novel was published in Hebrew in 2008 but translated by Yardenne Greenspan into English in 2016. None of the novels are award winners, but Brooks received the Pulitzer Prize in 2006 for her novel *March*, and L'Engle's novel *A Wrinkle in Time* won the Newbury Medal in 1963. The eleven novels thus represent seventy years of fiction writing about Bathsheba, inviting comparison and contrast within the particular genre of fictional novels.

The novels about Bathsheba are cultural products that reflect the social locations in which they were produced. All of them present idealized notions about gender and the socio-cultural and political contexts of the writers. The writers' gender and their own faith commitments shape how they imagine Bathsheba. Interestingly, the novels also share common elements in the plotline and in the selection of the characters. For instance, Bathsheba is always married to Uriah before she marries David, and the first child she conceives with David dies. Still, the novelists depict Bathsheba in diverse ways, although their depictions always share one important characteristic. The novelists always amplify and reify gender essentialism not only for Bathsheba but also for David and all the other characters. Thus, rigid and predictable gender stereotypes permeate the imaginative retellings about a biblical story that could offer considerable possibilities for a non-essentialist view of its female character.

The analysis of the eleven novels proceeds in three sections. The first section examines how some novels depict Bathsheba in the binary roles of a full-blown seductress of David or his victim. The second section investigates novels that present Bathsheba's relationship with David as a love and romance story. The third section analyzes how novels imagine Bathsheba as a powerful woman who shapes her destiny in a self-determined fashion. The conclusion highlights the main findings and elaborates on the significance of studying Bathsheba's literary reception history. Because there is not enough space in this essay to exhaustively

discuss each novel's characterization of Bathsheba, the essay's three sections examine only the most salient examples; no section considers all eleven novels. Moreover, since each of the novels focus more on sex and romance than on Bathsheba's power, the third section on her power will be shortest.

The Depiction of Bathsheba as Seductress and Victim

The biblical text is ambiguous about Bathsheba's motivation for coming to the king. As 2 Sam. 11:4 states: "And David sent messengers and she came to him and he lay with her." The verse does not mention how or why she came. Did she arrive eagerly, voluntarily, or forced? This central gap about Bathsheba in the biblical text makes the novelist's decision to depict her as a seductress or victim even more significant. The writers fill in the break in the biblical narrative in various ways.[5] Some novelists choose a binary characterization of Bathsheba so that she is either a seductress or a victim.[6] Other novelists strike a middle ground imagining Bathsheba to be unaware of David watching her during the bath. Yet they also depict her as arriving willingly at his palace after he sends for her.

The following analysis includes only those six novels that best illustrate Bathsheba's role as a seductress, a victim, or both. Additionally, the analysis does not follow the chronological order of publication, but it proceeds thematically to highlight the most pointed characterizations of Bathsheba. Importantly, five of the eleven novels depict Bathsheba as the seductress of David, a figure to be blamed for David's sexual desire. Joseph Heller's novel, *God Knows* (1984), is the most blatant at unambiguously depicting Bathsheba as a temptress. One particularly important scene involves Bathsheba confessing to David that she decided to bathe naked on her roof to seduce him. After they have sex together, Bathsheba tells David she conceived this idea when she saw him dancing naked before the ark (cf. 2 Samuel 5):

> I took a good look. I had to believe that your wife was a lucky woman. I envied her. I couldn't get over how well hung you were. It was then that I made up my mind to meet you. A king and all that too—who could resist? So I began bathing on my roof every evening to attract you.[7]

In this direct speech Bathsheba admits to being attracted to the king and having wanted to attract him.

However, in Heller's imagination Bathsheba is not the only character who

tries to seduce. David, too, wants to have sex with the woman, and so, in Heller's novel both characters are implicated in the extramarital affair. For instance, Heller's David confesses to his feelings of attraction when he first notices Bathsheba on the rooftop. He explains:

> I lusted, sent for her, and had her that same day. And the next morning . … This was love . … I wanted to fuck her every day. I want to fuck her now. We arranged after that first night that she would bathe on her roof each morning and each evening on days I could not have her with me but would be free to watch her. Her motions were lascivious when she knew I was staring.[8]

As the quote indicates, Heller imagines the bathing scene as an ongoing event. Heller emphasizes that Bathsheba's bathing is not a single occurrence, but even after "that first night" she continues to bathe on the roof so David would be titillated by the sight. The erotic scene is on full display when the novelist imagines David pondering both seeing the naked Bathsheba night after night and being sexually aroused by the sight. Heller's David muses about Bathsheba's body in explicit language:

> She was as naked as a jaybird and not afraid. I was impressed by that. She was not ashamed of the female form she presented or of my arrogant scrutiny, and the woman was indeed very beautiful to look upon. In fact she even turned herself toward me a bit more to allow me a better frontal view of her plump belly and thick mons veneris . … I sent to inquire after the woman and, scarcely breathing, hardly moving, gawked as she continued to lather and rinse seductively the rounded hills and pleasant valleys of her body.[9]

The erotically charged confession from the king's mouth rationalizes his command to get this woman to the palace. In Heller's description, Bathsheba turns into a "flamboyant sexpot."[10] Writing from the male perspective, Heller is not interested in presenting the woman as pursuing her own sexual desire and appetite. Rather, Heller's Bathsheba is wanton, as David desires her physical presence. In Heller's depiction she is David's object, and so Heller's language about Bathsheba is crude, explicit, and objectifying.

Other novels pursue different venues for characterizing Bathsheba as a seductress. For instance, Yochi Brandes does not include the bathing scene in her novel, but still features a seductive Bathsheba on the roof. According to the narrator, David's first wife Michal, Bathsheba "began walking around naked on the roof of her house at the precise time that the king liked to step out to the palace roof for some fresh Jerusalem air following his afternoon nap. Her persistence paid off, and eventually she received the coveted invitation for a onetime visit to the royal bedroom."[11] In Brandes's novel the character of Bathsheba "snares" David and she is successful after "trying to seduce David

over a long period."[12]

Only one novelist chooses a completely different rationale for David's demand for sex with Bathsheba. In the novel by Geraldine Brooks, the woman is not a seductress but a rape victim who is at the mercy of the powerful king. Brooks composes the following dialog between Nathan, the prophet, and Bathsheba:

> "I fear you, Natan. And I fear the king." I laughed. "Why would *you* fear the king?"
> "Why would I *not* fear him?" She looked up, her face suddenly hard. "Do you think I did not fear, dragged from my home in the dark, to be debauched and discarded?" I regarded her coldly. Easy enough to cry rape, when you are the one who has invited the seduction . … "And I suppose there was no private place inside your house where you might have bathed, instead of the rooftop directly overlooked by the king's terrace." My voice dripped with sarcasm. "Of course, you didn't realize. You had no idea you would be seen and admired, invited to his bed. A bored girl with an absent husband; you never entertained the idea that it would be diverting, to be desired by a king."
> "How could you think …" Her voice was low and furious. "'*Invited*' … For someone who sees so much, you are so blind! … Don't think I haven't flayed myself for my mistake. Every day, every single day, I ask myself why I went up there. Do you have any idea what he was like, that night? He used me like some—receptacle. The bruises on my breasts took a month to fade. I was afraid that Uriah would come home on leave and see the marks . … When he bundled me out—tossing me a jewel, as if I were a whore requiring payment—it was over for him, but not for me. I lived every day in fear, knowing my life hung by a spider's thread, waiting for word of my dishonor to reach Uriah—Uriah, a man for whom honor was everything."[13]

In this conversation, Nathan assumes that Bathsheba seduced David by bathing where she could be seen. However, Bathsheba describes a violent experience of rape, with "bruises" on her breasts. Through this dialog the novelist articulates how Bathsheba, a victim of sexual assault, is further traumatized by Nathan who blames her for the rape. He later acknowledges, "[David] had been raping her. And I had let myself call it a seduction. As I looked at her now, I was shamed by my own thoughts. In a way, I, too, had violated her."[14] Here, Nathan recognizes the difference between rape and seduction, and so the novelist articulates and then overturns the common view that blames Bathsheba for the sexual encounter with David. Although some interpreters acknowledge the possibility that Bathsheba is a victim, only feminist exegetes classify her victimization as rape.[15] Perhaps one of the reasons for the general reluctance is that the Hebrew vocabulary for rape is absent in 2 Samuel 11.[16] Another reason could be that even contemporary legal definitions of rape are inconsistent.[17] Thus, only Brooks's novel specifies that Bathsheba is raped. The other ten novels describe Bathsheba as consenting to the sexual encounter with the king.

Yet, many of the novelists do not depict Bathsheba as only a seductress or as

a rape victim-survivor. They imagine her as an initially reluctant but ultimately willing participant in the sexual encounter. For instance, Allan Massie imagines the following scene in which Bathsheba meets the king for the first time. Here, David appears as the sexually aggressive partner and Bathsheba is receptive:

> "O my lord king, then I should not be here," she sighed, lowering her eyes but extending her lips towards me. I drew her to me and kissed her lips and fed upon roses and tasted delight. Her tongue searched out mine and danced. I slipped my hands under her thin robe and tore it apart and let it fall to the marble floor. I kissed her warm breasts and let my hand run over her body, and her flesh yielded and she pressed herself against me. "I have loved the King," she murmured, "since I saw him when I was a little girl and had no breasts."[18]

Clearly, the woman welcomes the king's advances despite her initial comment. Massie's description of their lovemaking is also more detailed than other novels. The first time they have sex, David explains: "[S]o I entered into her and we were one flesh, three, no four times . … "[19] Later in Massie's novel, David refers to Bathsheba's "inbreathing, gasping desire … she knew, as if by nature, all the skills, refinements and devises by which pleasure is both intensified and prolonged."[20] In contrast, the depiction of the intercourse in 2 Sam. 11:4 is terse, merely stating: "and he lay with her." Massie and Heller, both male novelists, write more graphic sex scenes than the female novelists. Unsurprisingly the three novelists Door, Rivers, and Smith, who write for Christian audiences, have chaste sex scenes.

Two novels depict Bathsheba as a seductress but make the seduction more complicated than simple sexual desire. They explain Bathsheba's motives in more detail. In Jack Engelhard's *The Bathsheba Deadline*, Bathsheba seduces David in order to escape her frightening husband. Engelhard's seductive Bathsheba, "Lyla," plans to have sex with the David character, "Jay," confessing it to Jay after their encounter, describing the event as follows: "I took her, right there upon my desk. 'Oh!' she cried out at the start as if it had all been so totally unexpected."[21] Englehard's description of "Lyla" includes that she "had killer legs … cared nothing for rules … sultry … a dangerous flirt … came at you full of daring . … "[22] However, in Englehard's retelling, Lyla seduces Jay because she wants a divorce from her husband, who would not allow her to leave. Jay and Lyla discuss this situation: "'You're not afraid of him, are you?' 'Afraid? No. Terrified.'"[23] Not only does the depiction of Uriah as a villain justify the seduction, it also makes Uriah's death more justifiable and less tragic.[24] In Englehard's retelling, Jay and Lyla collude in the decision to send the husband to a dangerous location in the Middle East as a combat journalist. "'We couldn't do

that,' she said resolutely. 'Of course not,' I said. Then she added, 'Could we?'"[25] Lyla has agency and she uses her sexuality to influence Jay, participating in the plot to kill her husband. Even so, she requires a man to escape her marriage.

Francine Rivers's novel *Unspoken* also features Bathsheba as a seductress, but the storyline complicates the seduction. Rivers imagines Bathsheba's internal dialog when she notices David watching her:

> She remembered how David had looked at her the day she was given to Uriah in marriage and felt all over again the shock of attraction she'd seen in his eyes. If he had noticed her sooner, he could have taken her as his wife instead of looking at her like a starving man. She knew she should flee to the privacy of the house and complete her bath later, but hurt and resentment filled her. Why not let him see what he had let slip through his fingers? She boldly looked up.[26]

In Rivers's novel Bathsheba wants David to see her. But she does so out of "hurt and resentment," regretting that David did not marry her sooner. Rivers also imagines about David's thoughts when he sees Bathsheba bathing:

> For an instant, he was embarrassed to be caught staring at her during such private ablution. But only for a moment. He was the king, after all, and it was his roof. He had every right to stroll it whenever he pleased. She could have bathed inside her house instead of setting up a canopy in her courtyard. What possessed her?[27]

Rivers's David knows the power he has as king, and he uses the language of his "right" before blaming Bathsheba for what she does instead of what she "could have" done. Such blame and justification are heard all too often in today's world.

To summarize, the novels present Bathsheba as a seductress or a victim, with several novels imagining her as a willing participant. The spectrum demonstrates that there are different possibilities for understanding Bathsheba, but most characterize her as a seductress and as wanting to have sex with David. Brook's novel, *The Secret Chord*, is an exception because it depicts Bathsheba as an unambiguous victim-survivor of rape.

Love and Romance

The Hebrew word for love, *ʾahab*, appears neither in 2 Samuel 11–12 nor in 1 Kings 1–2. Nevertheless, five of the eleven novels turn the story between David and Bathsheba into a romance. They are Gladys Schmitt's *David the King*, Roberta Door's *Bathsheba*, Madeleine L'Engle's *Certain Women*, Francine Rivers's *Unspoken: Bathsheba*, and Jill Eileen Smith's *Bathsheba: A Novel*. This

focus demonstrates that the novels not only add details not present in the biblical text, they also reify gender stereotypes.

The fictional development of the terse biblical story into a tale about intense love and romance between a woman and her king follows a predictable pattern. It always features Bathsheba in a bath leading to the romantic encounter. For instance, Gladys Schmitt begins her romance story with the bathing scene. In this novel Bathsheba is unaware of David watching her until he unintentionally creates noise while moving away. At that moment, Bathsheba responds by standing "simply, submissively, with her arms at her sides, her head tilted backward a little, one breast and shoulder bare."[28] Schmitt imagines that their eyes meet and a sexually charged depiction of their thoughts is next, as Schmitt writes:

> In that look, she freely rendered up more to him than he had taken in secret when he beheld her nakedness. It was as if she had said aloud to him, "Here I am without a veil to hide me. Behold, my spirit rises naked in my eyes to stand before my lord." And he knew that he also had gone forth unveiled to her in this look. She beheld him now as no other living being had ever beheld him . … When she was gone, he walked slowly across the roof . … He walked a little way through the shadows, and then stopped and rested his forehead against a pillar. A sweet shuddering came upon him. He breathed the scent of the cedarwood as he might have breathed the scent of her body. "I love you," he said, and wondered at himself, for he had never said these words to any other woman. "I love you, you have closed me away with you, let me come to you in reverence, let me embrace your knees, let me kiss your feet."[29]

In Schmitt's novel, David never declares his love to any other woman, but he does to Jonathan. In fact, Schmitt writes detailed scenes about the loving, sexual relationship between the two men.[30]

Even though L'Engle's book is set in the contemporary world, the Bathsheba character "Sophie" meets "David" in a bath. L'Engle depicts her as immature and silly. When she is asked how she met David, Sophie answers:

> "In a movie. I didn't have a talking part, but I needed the money. Any money. And I *was* in a bathtub." She giggled infectiously. "There were lots of bubbles, so it was all quite proper. David opened the bathroom door by mistake—the character he was playing that is—and apologized. I let out a little squeak and that was my scene. But for some reason the director couldn't get it right. He kept saying that Davie and I were fine, but he wasn't satisfied, so we did it over and over. Then Davie asked me out to dinner." "And the rest is history," David said.[31]

In a scene when Sophie is asked about whether or not she thinks the biblical Bathsheba knew that David could see her bathing, Sophie responds: "She was no dummy . … She must have known that she would be visible from the palace roof. She probably wanted her David as much as I did mine."[32] L'Engle suggests

that a woman who "wants" a man need not be vilified, allowing for some mutual desire between a man and a woman. Yet she also gives the character informal vocabulary, described as giggling, so that Bathsheba is less serious and more juvenile.

The three Christian novels also describe Bathsheba's relationship with David romantically. Door's writing fills in the gap about what happened when "she came to him and he lay with her" (2 Sam. 11:4). Door describes that they eat food (fruit, cakes) and drank wine. David then plays several songs on his harp and sings from Psalm 102, before he lays his head in Bathsheba's lap, and touches her face:

> Slowly she lowered her eyes to look at him and found she could not turn away. Gently, David reached up and pulled her down to him and kissed her. His kiss released a frozen, silent pond within her. Suddenly she was filled with an ecstatic joy she had not known was possible. All the love she had felt for him since the first time she had seen him riding home from battle, flooded up and around her. It was a wild, uncontrollable love, and for one dizzy moment she wanted to give herself to him in total abandon as his eyes were asking her to do.[33]

Door is careful to specify that Bathsheba chooses to "give herself" to David. He searches "her eyes to read in them her true feelings" and asks her: "Are you sure that this is what you want?"[34] He waits until she assents before he "picked her up and carried her to his couch."[35]

The novelistic depiction of love is often varied. In Schmitt's retelling, David loves Bathsheba and in Door's version, Bathsheba loves David, whereas in L'Engle's version they love each other. Smith and Rivers, however, depict a more conflicted romance. Smith has Bathsheba thinking about her husband Uriah as David is caressing her, even identifying that "[t]his was not love. Love was home with Uriah."[36] Yet, when David tells her, "I want you, Bathsheba," Smith writes:

> His words were a mere whisper, their meaning sinking deep, wooing her, softly stripping her resolve . … She should not be here. But she could not stop the longing, the desperate need to give herself to him, to know him as she was fully known. "I will stay," she whispered beneath the gentle pressure of his lips on hers. Emotion throbbed between them like a living, breathing thing. His kiss deepened, heating her blood, until desire won over reason.[37]

Desire and longing are not quite the same as love, but Smith's version of the events is similar to scenes found in other romance novels.

Rivers writes about David's love for Bathsheba, and her love for him, especially when Bathsheba hears about Uriah's death. Bathsheba weeps for Uriah and collects her tears in a bottle she wears around her neck.[38] When David

summons her, calling her “my love,” she does not respond. Rivers writes:

> Disturbed by her silence, David turned her to face him and tipped her chin … jealousy gripped him as he saw the small bottle on a string. He lifted it mockingly. “Did you love him so much?” “I loved Uriah,” she said softly. She raised her head. Her eyes were dark with pain. “But not as I’ve loved you. You were always the man of my dreams … the man who held my heart in the palm of his hand.” She clenched her fist, her eyes filling with tears. David touched her cheek, marveling at the softness of her skin … “You’ll never know how much I love you, Bathsheba.” He saw her shudder and cupped her face. “You are my wife now.” Ignoring the distressed look in her eyes, he removed the bottle of tears and tossed it aside.[39]

In Rivers’s novel the ultimate love is not found in romantic love between husband and wife but in the love of God. After the first child dies and Solomon is born, Rivers writes about Bathsheba:

> [She] learned not to expect perfect love from David, for to have those expectations increased her suffering . … She turned her attention from David’s wandering eye to God and his faithfulness to His people. Her husband could still arouse her physical passion, and she could still feel suffering, betrayal, confusion, and loneliness. But she was no longer in despair, no longer without hope. The Lord God of Israel taught her about love, faithfulness, forgiveness, provision, protection, peace, and compassion. Every time David wounded her, she turned to God for healing and comfort. And the Lord was always there. For His love *was* perfect.[40]

In Schmitt’s novel, the romance between Bathsheba and David fades after Solomon’s birth. Schmitt depicts David as reflecting on the diminished relationship, writing: “[I]t was when Solomon was born that we first turned a little aside; for she gave half her heart to Solomon, and I am not such a one as can thrive on half a heart.”[41] Something similar occurs in Heller’s novel. Yet, in contrast to Schmitt’s, Heller does not portray romance or tenderness between David and Bathsheba. Instead he composes the following conversation between Bathsheba and David regarding Solomon’s succession:

> “Didn’t you promise me that he would be king?” “Why in the world would I promise you that?” “Because I was giving you great fucking, that’s why,” she retorts defiantly without an instant’s delay . … Who can tell what happened? She lost her lust when she embraced motherhood and settled on her true vocation, her life’s work: to be a queen mother.[42]

Heller presents a Bathsheba who apparently cannot be both a mother and a woman with sexual desire, as if they were mutually exclusive for women. Sociologist Francesca Cancian’s essay, “The Feminization of Love,” presents the idea that love often gets identified with emotional expression and not as instrumental and physical aspects of love, such as taking care of someone or sexual desire. Although Cancian makes essentialist assumptions about what is

"feminine" and "masculine," she also proposes "an alternative, androgynous perspective on love … for men and women to reject polarized gender roles" in relationships.[43] As the novels invent a romance between David and Bathsheba, they use emotional and expressive relational language Cancian describes as typical of "feminine" understandings of love. Accordingly, the novelists often characterize Bathsheba as an emotional damsel in distress, and so they turn the biblical story into a romance between the two protagonists.

Imagining Bathsheba with Power and Agency

Whereas Bathsheba's power and agency in 2 Samuel 11–12 is debatable, in 1 Kings 1–2 she is not only a queen but a queen mother when her son Solomon succeeds David.[44] Biblical scholars have long debated whether David promised Bathsheba that Solomon would take the throne (cf. 1 Kgs 1:13, 17), or if Nathan invented the promise.[45] Unsurprisingly, novelists offer different possibilities. As mentioned above, Heller imagines David as promising Bathsheba that Solomon will be king; Bathsheba's "power" over David is related to his lust for her. Brooks, Heym, and Massie write that both Nathan and Bathsheba are responsible for Solomon's kingship. Brooks describes Bathsheba as "wise enough to know that her own relationship with the king would color his dealings with her son, and that if she had to set aside certain unsavory facts and bitter memories in order to further that, then she would do so. In hints and allusions, she had let me see that this was her object. When I looked at her now, I no longer saw a haunted girl but a mature and confident woman, secure in her precedence with the king."[46] This pragmatism in favor of Solomon continues in Brooks's novel in which Nathan directs Bathsheba to tell David that he had promised Solomon to become king:

> She stared at me, her eyes very wide, her face pale. "But he made me no such promise," she whispered . … "Say it. I will support you." "I can't," she said, her voice catching, "it isn't true." "You will. If you love your son. You will do what is necessary."[47]

Brooks has Bathsheba use her "precedence" with David to ensure Solomon's kingship. She does not invent the promise on her own, but she uses her power to "do what is necessary" for Solomon.

Like Brooks, Heym holds Bathsheba responsible for Solomon's kingship.

However, he is also much more critical of both Bathsheba's and Solomon's use of power. Heym's *The King David Report* depicts Solomon as a brutal totalitarian who permits no opposition of his rule. In the novel Solomon was only put on the throne through the machinations of his mother, but in order to have his rule vindicated, Solomon commissions an official report to indicate that King David chose him. Heym also dismisses the possibility that Bathsheba has genuine feelings for David by sarcastically referring to "the story of that heart-warming, tender love of King David and the lady Bath-sheba, that sweet and blessed union … ."[48] The character of Ethan the Scribe explains that when he was commanded to write the story of the relationship between Solomon's father and mother "I did so, omitting the more sordid features or at least palliating them."[49] In Heym's version, David behaves meekly and gives in to Bathsheba "in all that she demanded of him."[50] Heym, describing Bathsheba's role in consolidating Solomon's reign, states: "[B]utter would not melt in her mouth, but the tip of her tongue carried death."[51] Heym was an East German dissident who wrote his novel, *The King David Report*, to criticize how political systems use propaganda to support totalitarianism.[52] Accordingly, as a ruler Solomon is critiqued most heavily, but Bathsheba is the one standing behind Solomon's unfair commands. Thus, in Heym's novel, Bathsheba is the originator of the abuse of power during Solomon's kingdom, a sexist position after all.

Other novelists wrestle with the characterization of Bathsheba as the driving force behind the United Monarchy's success. For instance, Massie's novel depicts Bathsheba's power over David as explicitly wrong because she is a woman and women are not supposed to have political power. Thus, Massie's David explains on his deathbed that he will make Solomon king "because I am old and cannot oppose his mother Bathsheba . … I have turned against Bathsheba now, though too weary and feeble to oppose her will."[53] In reflecting on his earlier years, David also comments, "I was powerless against Bathsheba, for she had a capacity to disturb me, and an ability to make my life wretched, that were too strong for me. It is not good for a man to depend on a woman as I did on Bathsheba in those years."[54] In Massie's novel, then, Bathsheba decides to exclude Absalom from the palace and to confine him to his house (cf. 2 Sam. 14:24–33). Moreover, the powerful military leader Joab is jealous of Bathsheba's influence over David.[55] These dynamics emerge when David recognizes that Absalom and other young men "mock me, because I am governed by a woman."[56] He even despises himself "because I had allowed my wife to govern me."[57] This novel also gives Bathsheba military influence when Absalom

attempts his coup against his father and David sends a message to Bathsheba "urging her to collect troops and hold them at my disposal."[58] At this moment David also thinks that "I had erred by permitting Bathsheba too much influence over me."[59] Perhaps this novelist articulates what he believes were the gender stereotypes of Israelite society during the Iron Age. Even so, Massie's assertion that the dependence of a man on a woman or his being "governed" by a woman are presented as shameful to his contemporary readers.

The same negative view of female power and control also appears in Brandes's *The Secret Book of Kings*. In this 2016 novel, Bathsheba has a great deal of power and control, which Brandes depicts negatively, writing:

> Most kings rise to the thrones thanks to their mothers. A king has many wives, and each of them dreams of giving birth to the crown prince and becoming the queen mother. The competition is fierce, and the winner is the most ambitious, craftiest, most devious, and cruelest *woman* of them all. I know David's wives … and I have no doubt that Bathsheba will be able to defeat them all.[60]

In this novel, Bathsheba and Ahitophel even convince Tamar to pretend to have been raped to remove Amnon from the path to the throne.[61] In the preface, Brandes identifies her work as "subversive"[62] because she imagines Saul's descendants as telling an alternative version of the biblical story. In this way Brandes communicates that victors write the (biblical) history. Yet, as Brandes elevates the women in Saul's family, Michal and Rizpah, she also denigrates Bathsheba and Tamar. Brandes's feminism resembles a zero sum game in which some women are the heroines and others are villains. The plotline, where Bathsheba, Ahithophel, and Tamar collude to fake Tamar's rape, is particularly disturbing since Bathsheba's deviousness includes lying about sexual victimization.[63] In short, Brandes imagines Bathsheba as a woman who uses her power without compunction.

The various novels, then, present conflicting depictions about Bathsheba as a queen using her considerable power and control to her political advantage. Some novelists place the responsibility for Bathsheba's success in making her son the next king with Nathan, the prophet. Yet the majority of novelists portray Bathsheba as a power hungry, cruel, and ruthless woman. They even represent David as being afraid of her power, imagining women in subordinate roles to men, especially when they are kings.

Conclusion

As the eleven novelists imagine and narrate Bathsheba's feelings, thoughts, and motivations, their depictions and characterizations of Bathsheba go far beyond the biblical text. Not all of the novels share the same assumptions about Bathsheba, they depict her in various ways. She is either a seductress or a victim; she is in love with David or she manipulates him and others for her son's gain. Many novels narrate Bathsheba's bath in great detail. Some novels describe her bathing in the open where she could be easily seen, while others explain how she took care to bathe in a secluded, private location. They also give specific descriptions of Bathsheba's beauty. The biblical text states, "the woman was very beautiful" (2 Sam. 11:4), but novelists write that she has dark hair and full lips[64] or that she is small, pale, and delicate.[65]

Yet, despite the creative, diverse, and imaginative gap filling about Bathsheba, all of the novels depict her in gender stereotypical ways. Certainly, they sexualize and objectify her. They also present her as giggling and naïve, as in L'Engle's novel, or make her into an utterly romantic character, as in the Christian fiction novels of Rivers, Door, and Smith. In Schmitt's novel, Bathsheba is childlike, small, and vulnerable, "standing submissively" before David.[66] These novels have particular trouble in presenting Bathsheba as a woman with power and control. For example, in the stories of Brandes, Heym, and Massie, the female character is cruel and other individuals in the storyline explain why women with power mean always trouble. In many novels, Bathsheba needs the help of men like David or Nathan to tell her what to do. Others criticize Bathsheba when she takes matters into her own hands.

Another important observation emerges from the analysis of the eleven novels. All of them invent so many aspects about the terse biblical tale that it is almost impossible to consider them "biblical" retellings. Importantly, their retellings are far more misogynist than the biblical story. Certainly the biblical narrative does not portray Bathsheba through a feminist lens, as it features the androcentric, kyriarchical stereotype of a nearly silent woman.[67] Yet the biblical characterization is ambiguous enough to allow for feminist possibilities. In contrast, the novels present a fixed, stable, and clear-cut portrayal of Bathsheba in which all ambiguity is lost. Bathsheba is a romantic lead, a scheming mother, a seductress, or a victim. Only if one read all of the novels together, one would recognize that they characterize Bathsheba in various ways, sometimes even contradicting each other.

This kind of analysis from the world of literature enhances the feminist study of the Bible by demonstrating that narrative retellings of the biblical text perpetuate gender stereotypical roles. Overall, the novels about Bathsheba rely

on the Bible as a tool for patriarchy and kyriarchy. Perhaps readers of these literary retellings will be inspired to return to the Bible. Or potentially, they will read scholarly analyses of biblical characters portrayed in the novels. However, for some readers, these narrative retellings end up replacing the Bible. Those who only read these kinds of novels about Bathsheba would then miss the possibilities for liberative and empowering interpretations of her character based on the biblical text. As much as biblical scholars might eschew "popular" interpretations of the biblical text, those retellings have the power to shape people's views about the content of the Bible. As novels are written about other female biblical characters,[68] the work of feminist biblical scholars to analyze such retellings becomes all the more important.

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[1] In the books of 1 and 2 Samuel, Bathsheba is the subject of thirteen verbs and speaks only two words. In the books of 1 and 2 Kings, she is the subject of twenty verbs and speaks 101 words.

[2] These distinctions—"more of" and "more from"—come from fanfiction theorist, Sheenagh Pugh. She explains: "There is canon material which creates a world so entertaining and congenial to the readers that they cannot bear to leave it even when it comes to its natural end—they want 'more of' it . … And then there is canon material which, though it draws its readers or viewers in, strikes them as being far from

perfect or fully realized; they see possibilities in it which were never explored as they might have been. They want 'more from' their canon"; see Sheenagh Pugh, *The Democratic Genre: Fanfiction in a Literary Context* (Bridgend, Wales: Seren, 2005), 42.

[3] Roberta Door (1922–2010) was the wife of a missionary surgeon stationed in Gaza and Yemen, with a master's degree in religious education from the Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, KY. Francine Rivers published a five-book series, entitled *A Lineage of Grace* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2000–2001). Each book in the series deals with one of the five women mentioned in Jesus' genealogy in Matthew 1. They are Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary. Jill Eileen Smith's book on Bathsheba is part of her three-book series entitled *The Wives of King David* that includes the biblical women Michal and Abigail (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2009–11). The novels by Door, Rivers, and Smith are published by Christian publishing houses.

[4] L'Engle's book is about an elderly actor named David Wheaton who reflects back on his life with his eight wives and eleven children. Madeleine L'Engle, *Certain Women* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 1993). David's son-in-law is writing a play about the biblical David, which allows the others to reflect about how their own lives compare and contrast with the lives of the biblical characters. They make comments, such as "Alice is no Abishag," 350; or "Wesley Bowman looked like the prophet Samuel," 42. In Englehard's story, the main character, Jay, realizes the similarities between his own situation and that of the biblical narrative when, in a hotel room, the Bible is opened to the story of David and Bathsheba; see Jack Englehard, *The Bathsheba Deadline: An Original Novel* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2007), 228.

[5] For example, in the medieval era illustrators of illuminated manuscripts drew graphic images of Bathsheba bathing naked, coyly watching David looking at her, as in the Book of Hours of Louis XII; see Thomas Kren, "Looking at Louis XII's Bathsheba," in *A Masterpiece Constructed: The Hours of Louis XII*, ed. Thomas Kren and Mark Evans (Los Angeles, CA: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2005), 41–61. In contrast, none of the Jewish midrashim and the Talmud refer to her as seducing David but they place the blame on David; see Sara Koenig, *Bathsheba Survives* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2018).

[6] Notably, the most recent model imagines her to be a victim of rape. See Koenig, *Bathsheba Survives*, 230–32.

[7] Joseph Heller, *God Knows* (New York, NY: Knopf, 1984), 276. Not only is Heller a male writer, but his narrator is David. This double male focalization is perhaps the reason for Bathsheba commenting on the size of David's penis.

[8] Ibid., 27.

[9] Ibid., 264–65.

[10] Ibid., 282.

[11] Yochi Brandes, *The Secret Book of Kings: A Novel* (trans. Yardenne Greenspan; New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 2016), 243.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Geraldine Brooks, *The Secret Chord*, 230–32.

[14] Ibid., 232.

[15] In addition to Brooks, David T. Lamb argues for calling what happened between David and Bathsheba "a power rape"; see his *Prostitutes and Polygamists: A Look at Love, Old Testament Style* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 134. Anne Létourneau also named what happened as rape, pointing out how problematic—and even dangerous—it is to equate the absence of protest with consent. "Bathing Beauty: Concealment of Bathsheba's Rape and Counter-Power in 2 Sam 11:1–5," paper presented at the annual SBL meeting; Atlanta, GA, November 21, 2015. J. Cheryl Exum writes: "[R]are is the commentator who would

go so far as to describe this encounter as rape. Can it be because most commentators are men, and men are uneasy accusing other men of rape, even in an ancient text"; see J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (JSOTSup 163; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993) 173. Even Exum did not go so far as to assert that Bathsheba was raped. Yet in her 2010 publication, Susanne Scholz stated that Bathsheba is raped; see her *Sacred Witness: Rape in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), esp. 99–103.

[16] While there is no single Hebrew word that corresponds precisely to "rape," all three narratives about rape (Dinah in Genesis 34, the Levite's concubine in Judges 19, and Tamar in 2 Samuel 13) feature the *pi'el* of the root *'anah*, but it does not occur in 2 Samuel 11. Sandie Gravett argues that some verbs commonly used to describe sexual intercourse (שׁכב, "to lay" or ידע, "to know") depict sexually violent acts of rape but only when they are combined with other words such as the piel of ענה, or חזק, "strength, force"; see Sandie Gravett, "Reading 'Rape' in the Hebrew Bible: A Consideration of Language," *JSOT* 28 (2004): 279–81.

[17] The definition of "forcible rape" was updated within the FBI's Uniform Crime Report (UCR) Summary Reporting System (SRS) in 2012; it had been unchanged since 1927, when the definition was "the carnal knowledge of a female, forcibly and against her will." Also see "An Updated Definition of Rape," available at https://www.justice.gov/archives/opa/blog/updated-definition-rape. The legal definitions of rape and the policies for punishment still vary from state to state in the U.S.A.; see https://apps.rainn.org/policy/index.cfm.

[18] Massie, *King David*, 155. Bathsheba's words here are probably an allusion to Song 8:8, for Massie has David and Bathsheba quoting Song of Songs to one another in a number of other places in the novel; 155, 159, 161. The "young Bathsheba in love with David" is also present in Rivers's novel, which begins with an 8-year-old Bathsheba expressing that her "heart's desire" is to marry David. *Unspoken*, 303.

[19] Massie, *King David*, 155.

[20] Ibid., 157.

[21] Englehard, *The Bathsheba Deadline*, 19.

[22] Ibid., 4–19.

[23] Ibid., 29–30.

[24] Door makes a similar move by writing Uriah as cruel and unfeeling in her novel *Bathsheba*, 151, 194–96. Exum discusses that the 1951 film "David and Bathsheba" includes a speech in which David explains that he only spoke with Bathsheba after she and Uriah told him "there is no love in your marriage," and that the 1985 film "King David" portrays Uriah as an abusive husband; see J. Cheryl Exum, *Plotted, Shot and Painted: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 23–4.

[25] Englehard, *The Bathsheba Deadline*, 49.

[26] Ibid., 328.

[27] Ibid., 329.

[28] Gladys Schmitt, *David the King* (New York, NY: Dial Press, 1946), 437.

[29] Ibid., 437–38.

[30] Ibid., 23–25; 63–70. Heym and Brooks also describe a loving, sexual relationship between David and Jonathan.

[31] L'Engle, *Certain Women*, 252.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Door, *Bathsheba*, 207.

[34] Ibid., 209.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Smith, *Bathsheba*, 138.

[37] Ibid., 138–41.

[38] Rivers, *Unspoken*, 353.

[39] Ibid., 355.

[40] Ibid., 375.

[41] Schmitt, *David the King*, 589.

[42] Heller, *God Knows*, 111, 268.

[43] Francesca M. Cancian, "The Feminization of Love," *Signs* 11 (1986): 692–93.

[44] Niels-Erik A. Andreasen notes that the queen mother in Israel "held a significant official political position superseded only by that of the king himself"; see his "The Role of the Queen Mother in Israelite Society," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 45 (1983): 180.

[45] Walter Brueggemann and Choon-Leong Seow are skeptical about David making such a promise, but Jewish interpreters read 1 Chronicles 22 and 28 as evidence that David swears that Solomon will succeed him. See Walter Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), 14; Choon-Leong Seow, "1 Kings," *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 3 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1998), 19.

[46] Brooks, *The Secret Chord*, 261.

[47] Ibid., 326.

[48] Stefan Heym, *The King David Report* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1997), 155–56, 167, 172.

[49] Ibid., 175.

[50] Ibid., 164.

[51] Ibid., 184.

[52] See Peter Hutchinson, "Problems of Socialist Historiography: The Example of Stefan Heym's *The King David Report*," *The Modern Language Review* 81.1 (January 1986): 131–38; Vladimir Tumanov, "Divine Silence in Stefan Heym's *The King David Report*." 93.3 (July 2009): 499–509.

[53] Massie, *King David*, 4.

[54] Ibid., 193.

[55] Ibid., 196.

[56] Ibid., 200.

[57] Ibid., 198.

[58] Ibid., 208.

[59] Ibid., 203.

[60] Brandes, *The Secret Book of Kings*, 247.

[61] In Brandes's words: "Bathsheba and Ahithophel have to get rid of Amnon. They can wait patiently for Solomon to grow up and do it himself, with their help, of course. But when you have a rival, it's preferable to send someone else to take care of him, and it would be even better if the person you send has a motive to

harm your rival, because then no one would suspect you. That's precisely what Bathsheba and Ahithophel did … all that is left is to convince Absalom that Ahithophel has his best interest at heart and wants to help him clear Amnon out of the way. The rape story is a very good way to do that because the king would surely disinherit a rapist, and even if not, what could be more justified than a brother killing his sister's rapist? No one would accuse him of murder. On the contrary, the nation would only think more highly of him . … If Amnon takes the throne, [Tamar] will be nothing but a distant princess, whereas the coronation of Absalom would ensure her status as sister to the king. Never fear, the sister of the crown prince isn't likely to remain alone and desolate"; see ibid., 253–54.

[62] Ibid., viii.

[63] While Brandes dismisses Tamar's cry of rape as false, she describes Rizpah and Michal as weeping when they hear that Absalom raped David's concubines (2 Sam. 16:22); see Brandes, *The Secret Book of Kings*, 260.

[64] Brooks, *The Secret Chord*, 229, 259.

[65] Schmitt states: "Her cheeks were as delicate and unblemished as the cheeks of a child, and the color of her flesh was the cool, transparent whiteness of the foam on new milk"; see Schmitt, *David the King*, 429.

[66] Ibid., 437.

[67] In fact, when J. Cheryl Exum refers to Bathsheba as being "raped by the pen," she explains that the phrase needs to be understood metaphorically. In her view, the text depicts "Bathsheba's treatment at the hands of the androcentric biblical narrator, whose violation of her character consists both in depriving her of voice and in portraying her in an ambiguous light that leaves her vulnerable not simply to assault by other characters in the story but also by later commentators on the story"; see Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 171.

[68] In addition to the series written by Rivers and Smith mentioned in n. 3, other authors published entire series on biblical women, including Marek Halter, whose series is titled "The Canaan Trilogy." The trilogy includes *Sarah: A Novel* (trans. Howard Curtis; New York, NY: Random House, 2004), *Zipporah, Wife of Moses: A Novel* (trans. Howard Curtis; New York, NY: Random House, 2006), and *Lilah: A Novel* (trans. Howard Curtis; New York, NY: Random House, 2006). "Lilah" is the sister of the biblical priest, Ezra. Orson Scott Card, author of the popular "Ender Quintet," also has a series on the women of Genesis, featuring *Sarah: Women of Genesis* (Salt Lake City, UT: Shadow Mountain, 2000), *Rebekah: Women of Genesis* (Salt Lake City, UT: Shadow Mountain, 2001), and *Rachel and Leah: Women of Genesis* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 2004). Other novels are about Esther; see, e.g., Tommy Tenney and Mark Andrew Olsen, *Hadassah: One Night with the King* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2004); Rebecca Kohn, *The Gilded Chamber: A Novel of Queen Esther* (New York, NY: Rugged Land, 2004). Tosca Lee wrote *Havah: The Story of Eve* (Nashville, TN: Quelle LLC, 2010), and Avraham Azrieli wrote two novels about Deborah: *Deborah Rising* (New York, NY: HarperLegend, 2016), and *Deborah Calling* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2017). This list is not exhaustive.

CHAPTER 26

TEACHING THE BIBLE AND POPULAR MEDIA AS PART OF CONTEMPORARY RAPE CULTURE

BEATRICE J. W. LAWRENCE

In the past decade, a broad and far-reaching conversation has taken place on the epidemic of sexual assault on college campuses. One significant component of this conversation examines the ubiquitous and deeply embedded cultural constructs of rape culture that legitimate sexual violence as inevitable, excuse violence as normative gender performance, and support the objectification and commodification of female sexuality. The cultural constructs of sexual violence are sustained in large part through their presence in popular media where students encounter them. A media-saturated worldview shapes student responses to biblical texts on sexual violence, which also creates opportunities for scholars to teach biblical texts about sexual assault in new and unique ways. Contemporary rape culture turns into an intertext that connects popular media and the Bible, illuminating attitudes about gender and power, as they appear in biblical texts, their interpretations, and popular media.[1]

This essay explores pedagogical strategies for addressing rape culture in academic Bible courses, employing Genesis 34 and Judges 19–21 as primary texts. The first section discusses the nature of popular culture and its impact on gender. The following four sections highlight four assumptions that characterize rape culture. Each section focuses on one assumption as it appears in the selected biblical texts and popular media. A conclusion summarizes the main points and outlines strategies for employing pedagogical strategies that address rape culture in biblical studies courses. Thus, the essay contributes to the reading and teaching of the Bible within contemporary rape culture so that students become

resistant readers of past and present rape culture.

The Impact of Popular Culture on Gender

In the past few decades, cultural studies have become a globalized means of expressing resistance. It is a diverse and multi-disciplinary field that identifies and critiques major forces in social construction and change. Scholarship in cultural studies examines the cultural products "consumed" in any given society. In the past, theorists examined "civilized" or "high" forms of art and writing while they dismissed popular "mass" culture as banal, low-class, and parochial. However, today's cultural critics recognize that so-called "popular culture" shapes people's identities, social movements, and power struggles. Popular culture consists of film, television, music, advertisements, online content, and social media, as it appeals to mass audiences.

For the first half of the twentieth century, cultural theorists focused on the industrial production of popular culture. They envisioned audiences to be "passive consumers of the goods foisted upon them." However, since the mid-twentieth century "consumers of popular culture came to be seen as increasingly active, and thus the process by which the message of popular culture is communicated [has become] increasingly complex."[2] Accordingly, popular culture does not only exist in a hierarchical system, as if it were delivered to passive consumers, but it also develops in alliance with the people consuming it. Popular culture responds to what audiences want. It represents the locus where culture is made *and* reflected, and where meanings are constructed *and* contested.[3] Thus, the study of popular culture affords scholars an opportunity to witness developed and developing understandings of gender performance, including sexual violence.

Evaluations of popular culture have also occurred in feminist cultural studies. Since the 1960s and 1970s feminist thinkers have participated in the field by challenging how the traditional focus on class and materialism ignores the cultural forces affecting women's experiences. The feminist foray into cultural studies was initially met with rejection,[4] but the field of feminist cultural studies has grown to include studies of literature, movies, television, art, advertising, fashion, academia, and more. In recent decades, the poststructuralist approach to feminist cultural studies challenges the binary categories of "man" and "woman," and focuses on the cultural production of those terms.[5]

Because of the sheer diversity and volume of popular culture, the work done in feminist cultural analysis is broad. In the past few decades, many studies explore the impact of popular culture on gender roles, body image, sexuality, and violence.[6] For example, the prevalence of gender archetypes and sexual violence is well documented in video games, including those rated "E for everyone."[7] One researcher states that violent video games "increase aggressive behavior" and "decrease prosocial behavior."[8] Gender stereotypes in video games include objectified representations of female attractiveness according to which a woman's beauty is proportional to the size of her breasts. Gay men are often presented as comical or flamboyant. Lesbians appear as highly sexualized characters who are often depicted in images pleasing the heterosexual male gaze. Lingerie and revealing clothing are standard outfits for female characters. Female sexual arousal and killing are often linked. Men are usually cold-blooded killers, as well as leaders, providers, and protectors. In contrast, women are followers, nurturers, healers, and incapable of protecting themselves.[9] Because of the prevalence of violence in video games, students must gain adequate education on gender, especially since many students encounter these games in their adolescence.

The impact of images on sexual violence and their prevalence in digital games is profound. A 2010 study explains that playing "sexually charged" video games increases the "tendency to engage in inappropriate sexual advances."[10] Yet not only do games propagate sexual violence, but the gaming culture itself is also a "man's world." The experiences of Anita Sarkeesian, a feminist media critic, illustrate this fact. She was targeted with rape and death threats when she publicly called out sexism in video games. She was even forced to cancel public speaking engagements due to safety concerns.[11]

Video games and gaming culture are only one of many places that produce and transmit the social matrices of gender performance in the minds of current students. Similar patterns appear in countless movies and on television where sexual violence is frequently employed as a plot device. Students are conditioned to associate hypersexualized women with danger, and to see violence as a source of "entertainment." The prevalence of harmful gender constructs in popular culture surpasses manufactured content, such as advertisements, games, or movies. Thus, harmful gender constructs also appear in celebrity tabloids, reports on sex scandals, and in fashion magazines. For instance, dangerous messages dominate the fashion industry where gaunt female models embody harmful bodily expectations and eating disorders.[12] Similarly, numerous tabloids line grocery store aisles, confronting shoppers with messages about the

praiseworthiness of rapid weight loss. They give advice on how to keep men sexually satisfied, share tips for perfecting normative appearance, and depict shocking sexual exploits of famous people. Such messages shape people's gendered expectations since childhood.[13]

By the time young adults go to college, they have received, mulled over, internalized, and re-enacted the many ideals about gender performance. They include various assumptions of rape culture. The cultural education influences the general hermeneutics of students and their responses to the materials and ideas students encounter in the classroom. The classroom is thus hardly a neutral intellectual space, as the idealization of sexual violence informs students and even faculty at all times. Good teaching requires that everybody becomes aware of the cultural patterns that shape our thoughts and practices.

This essay explores four assumptions of rape culture that students encounter in today's popular media. The assumptions also permeate biblical stories, such as the stories on the rape of Dinah in Genesis 34 and the events in Judges 19–21. The latter story contains both the violent gang rape and murder of the so-called concubine and the subsequent kidnapping and rape of hundreds of women. Each narrative provides rich materials for the exploration of stereotypical ideas about sexual violence. The four assumptions of rape culture are: first, the issue of forced consent; second, the habit of victim-blaming; third, the cultural view of men as hard-wired violators; and, fourth, the cultural assumption of male sexual entitlement. Each assumption appears both within the biblical stories and within contemporary popular culture. The critical analysis of each assumption teaches students to engage with the biblical texts and popular culture in new and powerful ways.

The Cultural Assumption about Forced Consent

A pervasive assumption of rape culture is the notion of forced coercion. It appears in Genesis 34 and Judges 19–21, as well as in popular media. Consent features prominently in conversations about rape culture, ranging from "No Means No" to the "Enthusiastic Consent" movement.[14] In spite of these conversations, the "consent question" is not settled. The issue is also not only about the words "yes" and "no." When victims are drunk, unconscious, or otherwise impaired, their inability to consent is often used against them with the

suggestion that rape requires protest and if there is no protest, there is no rape. Recently, a rape case was rejected by the Italian courts because the attacked woman did not protest loudly enough. Although she said “enough” and “stop it,” she did not shout, which in the eyes of the judge nullified her claim that she did not consent.[15] In other cases, the words “no” and “stop” are not considered to be sufficient evidence for the lack of consent, if the victim does not fight physically.

In rape culture, the idea is rampant that a person consents even when this person is coaxed or forcefully encouraged to consent to sex. This form of consent is classified as “coerced consent.” The issue is about the power differential between both persons. If one person has more power than the other, at stake is whether a “yes” really indicates consent from the inferior party. The question of forced consent appears frequently in the current #MeToo movement in discussions about assaults committed by powerful Hollywood leaders. For instance, Harvey Weinstein allegedly used his position in the entertainment industry to demand sex from struggling actresses and to cover up his assaults.[16] Coerced consent also occurs in many other situations, as for instance when a boss pushes a subordinate into sexual contact, when sexual favors are required in order for a person to achieve an important goal, or when waitresses tolerate sexual advances and even unwanted touching to get much-needed tips.

The acceptance of these problematic treatments of consent is chilling. According to a 2014 study, roughly 13 percent of college-aged men confessed to being willing to rape someone, but approximately 32 percent admitted to being willing to act on the intent “to force a woman to sexual intercourse” if “nobody would ever know and there wouldn’t be any consequences.” This study demonstrates that many men consider the idea of “forcing” a woman as less problematic than the word “rape.” The latter gives many of them pause, but the former is acceptable to every third interviewed man. The particular circumstances matter as well. If a woman is unconscious or if the man purchased her dinner, many men consider “force” acceptable.[17]

The issue of forced consent is also evident in Genesis 34 and Judges 19. As Dinah does not consent to the sexual encounter, Shechem forces Dinah in Gen. 34:2. He also negotiates to marry her without her approval, and only her male relatives set the wedding terms. Similarly, the Levite man takes the concubine of Gibeah from her father’s house with no record of her agreement. This fact is even more surprising since she leaves the Levite man in Judg. 19:2. Ultimately, multiple men rape her for a whole night. After she is dead, the remaining Benjaminite men sex-traffic the women of Jabesh-Gilead and Shiloh. The stories in Genesis 34 and Judges 19–21 are shocking as they illustrate powerfully the

acceptance of coerced consent in both biblical and contemporary rape culture.

In popular media sometimes humor mediates the lack of consent although the biblical narratives do not show evidence of literary humor. For instance, an advertisement for Belvedere vodka features a young man pulling a clearly alarmed woman onto his lap, accompanied by the words: “Unlike some people, Belvedere always goes down smoothly.”[18] The ad is meant to be funny, employing a risqué allusion to make a point about how smooth Belvedere vodka is. Yet it also alludes to the idea that he may need to force the woman to have sex with him, using physical strength or pressure. The message of this advertisement is clear: a woman’s consent is secondary to a man’s desire. Perhaps a parallel appears in the selected biblical narratives. As the man considers to force the woman to have sex with him in the advertisement, Shechem and the men of the tribe of Benjamin take what they want regardless of the women’s consent. Their desire supersedes the women’s agreement.

Another illustration of forced consent emerges in Robin Thicke’s famous 2013 song, “Blurred Lines.” This popular dance hit features lyrics that refer to the female object of attention as a “good girl,” who apparently behaves like “an animal.” The characterization of the woman as an animal reinforces the archetype of the sexually available woman hidden behind the image of innocence. Thicke tells her repeatedly: “I know you want it.” How does he know? He has an answer: “The way you grab me | Must wanna get nasty.” In verse 3, it is clear that the sexual encounter that Thicke believes to be imminent is coercive and violent. The verse states:

> Had a bitch, but she ain’t bad as you
> So hit me up when you pass through
> Give you something big enough to tear your ass in two . . . .
> He don’t smack that ass and pull your hair like that
> So I’m just watching and waitin’
> For you to salute the true big pimpin’
> Not many women can refuse this pimping
> I’m a nice guy, but don’t get confused, I’m pimpin.’[19]

This song presents a model of forced consent that is packaged in a party song. It celebrates that “nice guys” want to dominate women sexually, that sex rooted in domination is exciting, and that women want to be dominated. The very title of the song, “Blurred Lines,” references the treatment of consent in rape culture. The boundaries of acceptable sexual behavior are unclear, so the singer interprets the woman’s actions as in line with his own. He wants to engage her in a violent sexual encounter, so she must want it. In other words, if she wants something

other than what he wants, he refuses to see it. Read accordingly, the song with its message about forced consent horrifies students, enabling them to see it resonate in the biblical stories. These men, too, only see what they want, without concern for the wishes of their victims. Just as Dinah, the so-called concubine of Gibeah, and the women of Jabesh-Gilead and Shiloh are subject to the desires of men who disregard the women's wishes, so too contemporary popular media tales of desire ignore and disregard the women's consent. All of them illustrate the problem of coerced consent.

The Cultural Assumption of Victim Blaming

Another ubiquitous assumption of rape culture is that of victim-blaming. In this construct, rape is the responsibility of victims who must make sure they are not raped. Since rape is often inevitable, anyone who does not actively prevent it brings it on to themselves. In its most overt manifestations, this idea attacks the character of the rape victim. It suggests that the victim *desires* the assault because of her clothing or her whereabouts. Victim-blaming is often articulated in subtle ways. For instance, required dress codes in schools are rooted in the conviction that girls wearing tank tops or short dresses open themselves up to unwanted attention.[20]

Victim-blaming is apparent in Genesis 34 more than in Judges 19–21. The assumption is frequently articulated in post-biblical interpretations of Dinah's fate. They indicate that Dinah's two actions in Gen. 34:1 create an unfortunate opportunity to engage in victim-blaming.[21] For instance, rabbinic interpretations identify a causal link between verses 1 and 2. They explain that Dinah would not have been raped if she had not gone out to see the women of the land (as a "gadabout").[22] This kind of reasoning sounds familiar to university students because many of them participate in so-called rape prevention programs. These programs teach that rape prevention requires one to go out with a buddy, not to dress provocatively, not to lose track of drinks, or not to accept rides from unknown men. Accordingly, the focus of such educational programs is on potential rape victims. The message is not "Don't rape!" but "Don't get raped." Similarly, the ancient rabbis do not only view Dinah's bold action of walking in her neighborhood as blame-worthy, but they also recount tales of her being locked into a box to prevent her from being taken by a man.[23] Although this idea

seems ridiculous to contemporary students, it is not very different from some of recommendations of many rape prevention programs.

Television shows also reinforce the idea that the victim is to be blamed for the sexual violence. The scene of a woman violating the principles of rape-prevention education, venturing into "rape-able" territory, and thereby creating the opportunity for sexual assault to occur is a common assumption in shows, such as the award-winning British series "Luther."[24] This gritty drama recounts the work of a detective, John Luther, who has a troubled past and is a genius. In almost every episode of the show, violence against women serves as the primary plot device, whether it is stranger rape, forced violent prostitution, or torture by a sadistic madman. The plot unfolds at the beginning of each episode with a woman in danger, just as it does in Genesis 34. The woman leaves her home alone late at night, walks in an unfamiliar place, or walks alone down a dark street. This trope is a visual clue that we are about to experience an act, or at the very least the suggestion, of violence against a woman. Importantly, the occurrence of sexual violence moves forward the story of the brilliant but troubled detective.[25] Yet the depiction of a woman, venturing into a place she should not be, a place where she can be harmed, and making herself vulnerable in some way that is not wise, reifies the message that women should alter their behavior to prevent rape. Sexual violence props up Luther, the anti-hero, to present a showcase for his gifts and to underscore the view that women who violate the norms of rape prevention invite rape. It is noteworthy that in the entire series of "Luther" only one woman is not the victim of gender-based violence, but she is a psychopath who kills her own parents.[26]

As these examples illustrate, victim-blaming is a popular assumption both in biblical tales and in popular media. All of them suggest that the woman ought to be blamed for the experience of encountering sexually violent men. The fact that consent is neither requested nor given in Genesis 34 and Judges 19–21 is worthy of classroom discussion, as it highlights the ongoing struggle to name problematic attitudes about consent in popular media even today.

The Cultural Assumption of Men as Hard-Wired Sexual Violators

Yet another assumption of rape culture appears in the biblical tales and popular media. It is the belief that men will rape if they have the opportunity because

their biology and nature lead them to commit acts of sexual violence. The idea that men are hard-wired to behave violently is deeply ingrained in contemporary models of masculinity. It is taught and enacted in sayings such as “boys will be boys,” “boys are aggressive and girls are passive caretakers,” or “masculinity depends on aggression.” Related stereotypes about men having physical strength and not shying away from violence also reinforce the essentializing notion about men as being biologically wired to rape. The idea contributes to victim-blaming because it assumes that men cannot help themselves and so woman have to make sure they do not encounter male aggression. It appears frequently in entertainment culture, as media creators produce what they believe men like and buy. In other words, the assumption of men as hard-wired sexual violence.

This assumption is also evident in Genesis 34 and Judges 19–21. Shechem’s aggression and lack of impulse control reflect a notion of masculinity that other biblical men, such as Samson, also exhibit. Shechem sees, takes, rapes, wants, demands, and promises that he will pay any price for the woman he wants. In Judges, the men of Gibeah ravage the concubine violently—perhaps even to her death—and the Israelites both destroy the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead and steal the women as a justified consequence of their failure to engage in civil war. All of them are excessively violent men, but many contemporary readers excuse them and perhaps even identify with them despite their horrendous acts of violence.

However, before students are permitted to dismiss Shechem and the men of Judges 19–21 as evil and reprehensible, they must be confronted with popular-media stories depicting men as hard-wired sexual violators. One example is an Audi’s 2013 Superbowl ad,[27] featuring a young man who attends a prom without a date. His father, proud of his son’s courage, tosses him the keys to the car—an Audi. The keys represent the keys to manhood: driving a sporty, smooth-handling car to the prom emboldens the young man to walk confidently into the dance, to grab a pretty young woman, and to assault her by kissing her forcibly upon the mouth. He is subsequently punched by the woman’s boyfriend, but she smiles wistfully. The protagonist drives home happily, sporting a black eye. The meaning is clear. If a boy drives an Audi, he too can become a real man. He takes aggressively what he wants, and the woman he desires will like him for it. The biblical men do not act very differently from the man in this advertisement.

Another example is a short film by Gillette Corporation, released on January 13, 2019, that presents the notion that men are biologically wired to be rapists. Inspired by the #MeToo campaign, the film addresses the construct of aggressive masculinity directly by rebranding the company. Rather than presenting Gillette

shavers as the product supporting "The Best a Man Can Be" (the previous slogan) the ad promotes the new slogan of "We Believe." The film shows several scenes of men who exhibit aggressive and even violent behavior to illustrate how masculine identity needs to change.[28] For each man acting out violently, the film depicts another man stepping forward with a different way of being a man as gentle, peaceful, and respectful of women. Interestingly, the film does not seek to sell any product. Its sole purpose is to reframe toxic constructs of masculinity, particularly the idea that men naturally behave with violence and aggression. Although many people liked the film, welcoming public conversation about its importance, the film also created a forceful backlash.[29] Many men responded online with familiar phrases, such as "Let men be men!" A Twitter user suggested boycotting the company's products, writing: "I'm researching every product made by Proctor & Gamble [Gillette's parent company], throwing any I have in the trash, and never buying any of them again until everyone involved in this ad from the top to bottom is fired and the company issues a public apology." A Fox News commentator aligned the notion of a less aggressive man with femininity: "Does Gillette want men to start shaving their legs, too?"[30] For these angry commentators, a man is not a man without aggression, violence, or preying on women. Interpreted in this media context, the biblical men are not different from men today. They provide mirrors to analyze contemporary assumptions about men as hard-wired violators.

The Cultural Assumption of Male Sexual Entitlement

Still another assumption of rape culture appears both in the biblical narratives and in popular media. It holds that men are "owed" women. In other words, women exist to be sexually available to men, regardless of a man's behavior and regardless of a woman's wishes. In its most extreme form, this cultural assumption is evident in the discourse of "incel" (involuntary celibate) groups. They meet in online forums to fuel their misogyny to direct anger and even violence at women for denying them sex.[31] Yet the idea of male sexual entitlement also appears in many films, television, advertising, and online media.

The assumption of men's sexual entitlement to women is evident in Genesis 34 and Judges 19–21. For instance, Shechem never questions whether he earned the privilege of having sex with Dinah or even marrying her. His desire is the

only proof he needs to be with her. Her brothers demonstrate a similar entitlement. They, too, ignore her agency, deciding what should become of her. In the Judges tale, the civil war leaves only six hundred men of Benjamin alive, and so the male Israelites fear the loss of a tribe. Their solution is simple. The Benjaminite men ought to take the women dancing in the field. The idea is that, as men of Israel, the surviving men of Benjamin are owed wives, even if the women are acquired at random, with force and against their will.

The imperative to find wives for the male survivors of the tribe of Benjamin relates all too easily to the assumption of male sexual entitlement. It also appears in today's media. Marriage by kidnapping and the political dispersal of women's bodies are still realities on the global stage. Yet most students encounter subtler forms of this assumption by watching romantic comedies. In these films, men feel entitled to stalk, harass, and manipulate women into falling in love with them, with great success. For instance, Jennifer Lawrence loves Chris Pratt although he sentences her to death in "Passengers," and Anne Perkins decides to date Tom Haverford in "Parks and Recreation" because he pesters her for years and "finally wore her down."[32] The dominance of this trope in television series and movies is so prevalent that everybody knows it. Students often accept as a given that the degree to which a man is "truly interested" in a woman is directly related to how pushy he gets.

Male sexual entitlement appears also in the pattern of punishing women for upsetting men. We read of the so-called concubine in Judg. 19:2 that, in Hebrew, *wa-tizneh ʿālayw*. Translations of this phrase vary, but the verbal root indicates an act of prostitution.[33] How does this meaning pertain to the rest of the story? Students who learn of this potential translation wonder if the Levite is angry with her. They wonder if his later actions reflect his anger. This possibility is, of course, repugnant because nothing justifies the horror that unfolds in the narrative. However, some students know this kind of violence from popular media, especially from revenge porn, which provides the means to publicly shame, threaten, and even murder women sexually. "Revenge porn" refers to a specific form of media distribution, defined by D. Halder and K. Jaishankar as:

> an act whereby the perpetrator satisfies his anger and frustration for a broken relationship through publicizing false, sexually provocative portrayal[s] of his/her victim, by misusing the information that he may have known naturally and that he may have stored in his personal computer, or may have been conveyed to his electronic device by the victim herself, or may have been stored in the device with the consent of the victim herself; and which may essentially have been done to publicly defame the victim.[34]

The sexually violent images and videos range from nude or intimate photos to

sex acts. They are distributed as texts and emails or uploaded to websites, such as specific revenge porn sites or Facebook profiles. In each case, the images and videos are distributed without the consent of the person depicted therein. Sometimes, recipients of these materials are partners, friends, employers, or parents. In other cases, creators and purveyors of revenge porn make pictures and videos available to wide audiences, including strangers. Some creators of revenge porn even list publicly the names and addresses of the women depicted therein. In the past few years, legislation banning revenge porn and targeting specific websites, such as "IsAnyoneUp," "UGotPosted," and "WinByState," resulted in the removal of content, fines, and arrests. Although raising awareness of and action against such displays of revenge porn is to be lauded, this destructive activity still runs rampant. It even has led some marrying couples to include "revenge porn" clauses in prenuptial agreements.[35] The tenet of rape culture that supports this practice is simple. If a man is wronged, he has the right to subject his former partner/target to humiliation and abuse.

Revenge porn supports the construct of male sexual entitlement. Its expectation is that a "manly man" displays "his" women sexually. The very notion of a "trophy wife" reflects a construct in which masculinity is judged by the sexual desirability of a man's partner.[36] Mitchum ran an ad on its website showing what appears to be a film strip containing three negatives. Although the images are obscured, it is clear that a man is taking photos of a woman who is topless, accompanied by the words: "If you convinced her the photos are for your private collection, you're a Mitchum Man."[37] In this construct of male sexual entitlement, according to which a man owns his woman. He has the right to display or abuse her at will, especially if she wrongs him in any way.

Another popular concept illustrates the notion that men are "owed" women. The "friend zone" is a popular concept so ubiquitous that it is present in common, causal parlance. It even has an entry in the Urban Dictionary.[38] The "friend zone" is a space usually occupied by a man who is frustrated because a woman he finds attractive considers him to be "just a friend." The phrase is both a noun and a verb ("she friend-zoned me, man"), but in both cases it expresses frustration or disappointment about a failed romantic endeavor. The concept of the "friend zone" is, however, far more dangerous than a simple expression of male desire for romance indicates. On the contrary, the use of the term "friend zone" suggests that a woman *should* desire her male "friend," but she denies him access to her romantically and sexually. When she does not have sex with him, he is angry. His desire for her is more important than her (lack of) desire for him. Her agency is inconvenient. The term "friend zone" is used to criticize her use of

her own agency to deny him a sexual relationship. The notion of a "friend zone" thus assumes that a man should get the woman whom he desires. If she does not play along, she commits a transgression worthy of public comment.

A 2015 holiday ad by Bloomingdale's captures this dynamic all too succinctly. A man and a woman stand next to each other, obviously dressed for a party, and the woman is looking away while the man stares longingly at her. The text accompanying the image reads: "Spike your best friend's eggnog when they're not looking." In other words, the holidays are a good time to drug and rape the woman who puts a man in the friend zone. Thankfully, Bloomingdale retracted the ad and issued an apology. Even so, the link to both Genesis 34 and Judges 19–21 is obvious. The Genesis tale presents a complaint about the friend zone, and Shechem is right to seize and rape the woman he wants. The men in the Judges story also do what they want, even stealing women as wives. All of these stories illustrate the profound male sexual entitlement. Everybody needs to beware of such male friends.

Towards a Rape-Freeing Pedagogy in the Academic Teaching of the Bible: A Conclusion

Four central assumptions about sexual violence permeate rape culture. They also appear abundantly in the biblical stories of Genesis 34 and Judges 19–21 and in popular media. The assumptions are about, first, forced consent; second, the habit of victim-blaming; third, men as hard-wired violators; and, fourth, male sexual entitlement. The similarities of these assumptions, as they appear in the biblical narratives and popular media, illustrate the pervasiveness of rape culture. Thus, both the Bible and popular media illuminate the persistence and prevalence of rape culture. The four assumptions also demonstrate that both popular media and biblical stories contribute significantly to discussions on sexual violence.

Yet this essay only scratched the surface of what is possible. Many other biblical tales and poems offer further case studies for rape culture's presence in the Bible and in popular media. For instance, in Hosea 2 the treatment of Gomer invites discussions on intimate partner violence and slut-shaming, as the relationship between Hosea and Gomer matches the cycle of intimate partner violence. Moreover, the abuse the wife receives because of her infidelity

correlates to the popular notion that sexually promiscuous women deserve and receive violence. Ezekiel 16 and 23 are also useful for addressing slut-shaming, with an added opportunity to discuss snuff porn. These are rape videos that climax with the murder of the victim. Describing female body parts, sex acts, and sex toys in detail as well as violent abuse, the Ezekiel poetry helps explore the correlation between sexuality and death in popular media. Multiple cultural constructs are also evident in 2 Samuel 11–12, which include sexual entitlement, questions about power differentials and agency, the contemporary #MeToo movement, and male sexual aggression. In other words, opportunities to explore popular media in conjunction with biblical texts abound.

Developing connections between popular media and biblical texts is a time-consuming pedagogical approach. It also requires considerable media knowledge. In order to illuminate rape culture in popular media and the Bible, the definition of "research" has to be expanded. For instance, scholars must review digital media to become able of making knowledgeable connections to the Bible. Teachers must also become comfortable with the claim that the study of popular culture is valid research. Watching television shows and movies, and studying music, art, and advertisement are all necessary steps to become experts on teaching the Bible. The lacunae of this kind of research creates additional challenges for teachers of reading popular media by reading biblical stories. Students are fully immersed in the social and online media landscapes, and so contemporary researchers ought to explore the cultural assumptions embedded in today's media. By developing the necessary pedagogical resources, teachers will then be able to teach the Bible to today's students within the emerging media landscapes. Since any classroom includes both survivors *and* perpetrators of sexual assault, teachers have to be skillful communicators when they link digital media with biblical texts on sexual violence.[39] In sum, the critical analysis of past and present assumptions about rape culture represents an important area of teaching about the ongoing pervasiveness of rape-prone concepts, ideas, and notions. At stake is the critical exposure of ongoing rape-culture convictions as they appear in the Bible and digital culture to this very day.

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[1] This essay uses primarily heteronormative gender language by juxtaposing experiences and constructs of "men" with "women." Yet sexual violence does not only adhere to a heteronormative, hierarchical context. Although the vast majority of incidences of sexual assault are acts committed by men against women, men and women alike are raped, and rape within LGBTQ communities is also a grave problem. Still, rape culture represents a predominantly heteronormative model that encourages "men" to commit certain acts against "women." When men are raped, their masculinity compounds the problem. If it is the nature of men to rape and of women to be raped, then an additional burden of shame is placed on men who experience sexual assault. Those men are lowered to the level of women. In other words, rape culture is tied to heteronormative gender constructs, and it is important to analyze them as such.

[2] Andrew Edgar and Peter Sedgwick, eds., *Cultural Theory: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 1991), 285–86.

[3] This assertion is present in multiple publications on popular culture; see in particular Lana F. Rakow, "Feminist Approaches to Popular Culture: Giving Patriarchy its Due," in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, ed. John Storey (fourth ed.; London: Pearson, 2008), 183–98.

[4] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies," in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler, eds., *Cultural Studies* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1992), 277–94.

[5] See, e.g., Denise Riley, *Am I That Name?* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1988); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990).

[6] In fact, one could make the argument that feminist criticisms of popular culture already appeared in the novels and critical essays of Margaret Oliphant and Charlotte Perkins Gilman; see Elisabeth Jay, ed., *The Autobiography of Margaret Oliphant* (Calgary: Broadview Press, 2011); Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Man-Made World or Our Androcentric Culture* (New York, NY: Charlton Company, 1911). The bulk of work devoted to feminist analysis of popular culture started in the 1960s, with works such as Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (New York, NY: Norton, 1963). The 1970s witnessed a proliferation of such studies, including works by Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16 (1975):

6–18; Kathryn Weibel, *Mirror, Mirror: Images of Women Reflected in Popular Culture* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1977); Gaye Tuchman, Arlene Kaplan Daniels, and James Benet, eds., *Hearth and Home: Images of Women in the Mass Media* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1978). In the 1980s, critiques broadened to address matters of race and class, such as in Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Watertown, MA: Persephone Press, 1981). These publications incorporated theoretical approaches including psychoanalysis and film theory; see Janet Walker, "Psychoanalysis and Feminist Film Theory: The Problem of Sexual difference and Identity," *Wide Angle* 6 (1984): 16–23. In the 1990s, the "marriage" of popular culture and feminist thought resulted in movements such as "Girl Power," and concomitant analysis; see Gayle Wald, "Just a Girl? Rock Music, Feminism, and the Cultural Construction of Female Youth," *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture in Society* 23.3 (1998): 585–610. In the past two decades, series such as *Feminist Cultural Studies, the Media, and Popular Culture*, published by the University of Pennsylvania Press, have both broadened and deepened the disciplinary conversation. See the excellent summary of the history of feminist cultural criticism in Rakow, "Feminist Approaches to Popular Culture." For an excellent introduction, see Joanne Hollows, *Feminism, Femininity and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

[7] Kimberly M. Thompson and Kevin Haninger, "Violence in E-Rated Video Games," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 285.5 (2001), 591–98. Stacy L. Smith, Ken Lachlan, and Ron Tamborini, "Popular Video Games: Quantifying the Presentation of Violence and its Context," *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 47.1 (2003): 58–76.

[8] Craig A. Anderson and Brad J. Bushman, "Effects of Violent Video Games on Aggressive Behavior, Aggressive Cognition, Aggressive Affect, Physiological Arousal, and Prosocial Behavior: A Meta-Analytic Review of the Scientific Literature," *Psychological Science* 12.5 (2001): 353.

[9] M. Scott Gross, "Sexuality Education in Video Games: Recommendations for the Use of Video Games to Teach Human Sexuality Issues," pages 137–45 in Elizabeth Schroeder and Judy Kuriansky, eds, *Sexuality Education: Past, Present, and Future* (vol. 4) (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2009), 139.

[10] Mike Z. Yao, Chad Mahood, and Daniel Linz, "Sexual Priming, Gender Stereotyping, and the Likelihood to Sexually Harass: Examining the Cognitive Effects of Playing a Sexually-Explicit Video Game," *Sex Roles* 62.1 (2010), 77.

[11] For Sarkeesian's critiques of sexism in video game culture, see https://feministfrequency.com/tag/tropes-vs-women-in-video-games/.

[12] See https://www.eatingdisorderhope.com/information/the-fashion-industry-transcending-the-acquisition-of-thinness; celebrity stylist Tim Gunn has spoken out on this issue; see his comments here: https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/09/08/tim-gunn-designers-refuse-to-make-clothes-to-fit-american-women-its-a-disgrace/?utm:term=.0c5161ed6c17.

[13] For an example of gender differentiation in media geared towards children, see https://www.mprnews.org/story/2016/09/23/books-girls-life-vs-boys-life-magazine-comparison.

[14] For a discussions on "enthusiastic consent," see at http://www.gender-focus.com/2012/11/09/weve-got-to-talk-about-enthusiastic-consent/; http://persephonemagazine.com/2012/05/why-do-people-hate-the-concept-of-enthusiastic-consent/.

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[17] Sarah R. Edwards, Kathryn A. Bradshaw, and Verlin B. Hinz, "Denying Rape but Endorsing Forceful Intercourse: Exploring Differences among Responders," *Violence and Gender* 1.4 (2014): 188–93.

[18] https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2012/03/belvederes-goes-down-smoothly-ad-goes-over-badly/329782/.

[19] Robin Thicke's "Blurred Lines" can be viewed at https://www.vevo.com/watch/robin-thicke/blurred-lines/USUV71300454, and the lyrics are available at https://genius.com/Robin-thicke-blurred-lines-lyrics.

[20] This is, of course, at odds with the tendency to hypersexualize girls' clothing, even baby clothing.

[21] In some cases, biblical interpreters engage in victim-blaming as well; see Ita Sheres, *Dinah's Rebellion: A Biblical Parable for Our Time* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1990).

[22] Genesis Rabbah 18:2.

[23] Genesis Rabbah 76:9.

[24] Neil Cross, creator and writer, *Luther*, BBC One, since 2010.

[25] Here we have another rape culture trope: a woman is in danger of sexual assault at the hands of a man and must be saved by another man.

[26] For a brief online overview of sexual violence as a plot device, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luther_(TV_series).

[27] Audi's 2013 Superbowl ad is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nC_iIu-JTHw. Some responses are positive, as fans laud the ad as a "message of bravery" (as reported in the "Sports" column in the Huffington Post on February 3, 2013; available at https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/02/03/audi-super-bowl-commercial-2013-prom:n_2612420.html). The "Wired" contributor, Corinna Lawson, considers the ad as a celebration of sexual assault; see her "Audi Superbowl Commercial Fail: Sexual Assault is Good!" (February 4, 2013); available at https://www.wired.com/2013/02/superbowl-audi-commercial/.

[28] "We Believe: The Best Men Can Be" can be viewed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=koPmuEyP3a0.

[29] For a positive response to the film, see Emily Dreyfuss, "Gillette's Ad Has Proved the Definition of a Good Man Has Changed," wired.com, January 1, 2019: https://www.wired.com/story/gillette-we-believe-ad-men-backlash/.

[30] These responses and others can be found in Tovia Smith, "Backlash Erupts After Gillette Launches A New #MeToo-Inspired Ad Campaign," npr.org, January 17, 2019: https://www.npr.org/2019/01/17/685976624/backlash-erupts-after-gillette-launches-a-new-metoo-inspired-ad-campaign.

[31] For a discussion of what "incels" are, and how they represent rape culture, see Zack Beauchamp, "Our Incel Problem," vox.com, April 23, 2019: https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/4/16/18287446/incel-definition-reddit.

[32] John Spaits, writer, "Passengers," directed by Morten Tyldum, Columbia Pictures, 2016. Greg Daniels and Michael Schur, creators, "Parks and Recreation," NBC. The events described here occur in the episode "Cookie Tush," which aired on February 16, 2012.

[33] The New King James Bible translates this phrase of v. 2: "But his concubine played the harlot against him." The Septuagint of Judg. 19:2 reads: "She was angry with him." Although some translations adhere to the Greek translation, the study of the original Hebrew text is very useful for the study of rape culture.

[34] Debarati Halder and K. Jainshakar, "Revenge Porn by Teens in the United States and India: A Socio-Legal Analysis," *International Annals of Criminology* 51.1–2 (2013): 90.

[35] Christia Barakat, "Prenuptial Agreements Now Include 'Social Media Clause,'" (June 24, 2014): http://www.adweek.com/digital/prenuptial-agreements-now-include-social-media-clause/.

[36] Laken Howard, “The One Sexist Term That Needs to Be Retired” (July 25, 2015): https://mic.com/articles/122886/trophy-wife-needs-to-be-retired#.UvMChAFVF.

[37] This advertisement can be viewed at http://feministing.com/2008/10/03/mitchum:man_ads_the_new_axe/.

[38] See http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Friend%20Zone.

[39] For more on this, see, e.g., Rhiannon Graybill, Meredith Minister, and Beatrice Lawrence, “Sexual Violence in and around the Classroom,” *Teaching Theology and Religion* 20.1 (2017): 70–88; Corrine C. Bertram and M. Sue Crowley, “Teaching about Sexual Violence in Higher Education: Moving from Concern to Conscious Resistance,” Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies 33.1 (2012): 63–82.

PART IV

THE EMERGENCE OF INTERSECTIONAL FEMINIST READINGS

CHAPTER 27

GENDER AND THE HETERARCHY ALTERNATIVE FOR RE-MODELING ANCIENT ISRAEL

CAROL MEYERS

SINCE the late nineteenth century if not before, the term *patriarchy* has been used to describe ancient Israel by those seeking to understand the cultural context of biblical texts.[1] This term appears frequently in feminist discourse that examines and critiques the presentation of female figures in the Hebrew Bible and other ancient Near Eastern texts. However, the concept of patriarchy has never been closely examined. One problem is the slippery nature of the term itself, which is rarely defined by biblical scholars who use it. Nor is it a biblical term; the Hebrew Bible has a vocabulary for family units, but no word that might be translated as "patriarchy."[2] In this sense, patriarchy is not a biblical construct but a social-science theory—a fact that is seldom if ever acknowledged. Its role as a model for understanding any society, especially a premodern one, must be evaluated in light of changing perceptions of the patriarchal theory and increased knowledge about the societies to which it is applied. This essay argues that using the patriarchy model for understanding the biblical past is problematic and no longer compelling.

This essay examines the patriarchy model in several sections. The first section looks at the origins of this model in the study of ancient Israel during the nineteenth-century. The second section describes developments in twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholarship on ancient Israel. Challenges to the patriarchy

model emerged in three areas: classical studies, research on women in ancient Israel, and feminist theory; the next three sections outline the scholarly discussion in these areas. The concluding section proposes an alternative model that offers the concept of heterarchy as a path forward to remodeling ancient Israelite society.

But first, what does "patriarchy" mean? Taken literally, the term means the "rule of the father" from the Greek *pater* (πατήρ) and *archē* (ἀρχή). However, it has multiple meanings and is notoriously difficult to define.[3] Some definitions, claiming that women have the status of slaves in a patriarchal system, are especially harsh compared to others that simply refer to a system of male dominance. Another, better approach is to acknowledge that patriarchy has two manifestations: the father's control of families or clans; and, by extension, the organization of an entire society in ways that exclude women from community positions.[4] The first manifestation relates to the model's nineteenth-century origins, whereas the second emerges from twentieth-century developments.

The Origins of the Patriarchy Model in Ancient-Israel Research

The use of the patriarchy model for ancient Israel did not emerge in an intellectual vacuum. Rather, it entered mainly through the lens of anthropology. In the nineteenth century, as historical-critical biblical studies proliferated, scholars became frustrated by the incomplete and often contradictory materials in the Hebrew Bible.[5] Thus they turned to the newly developing social sciences, especially anthropology, thereby initiating the first of two "waves" of biblical scholarship that engaged social science.[6] Since these biblical scholars lacked direct evidence of ancient societies, they drew primarily on the work of anthropologists using Greek and Latin sources. Although some of these early theorists argued that matriarchy was the original family form, most maintained that fathers dominated; they used the term patriarchy to designate *families*, not society as a whole. Three figures were especially influential in this regard.

The first influential scholar is the English classicist and law professor Henry Sumner Maine. In his prominent 1861 book on law in ancient Greece and Rome, Maine draws on Latin legal sources and refers to the "life-long authority of the Father or other ancestor over the person and property of his descendants."[7] Elaborating on the role of the *patria potestas* ("the father's power"), he reports

that the father had the "power of life and death" (*vitae necisque potestas*) over his servants, children, and wife; he calls this "paternal despotism."[8]

Another prominent figure is the French scholar Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, who also drew on classical texts for his famous 1864 book, *La cité antique*.[9] In describing the family, he emphasizes that *pater* means absolute authority rather than simple biological paternity. He maintains that the term *pater* should be understood as synonymous with "king" (Latin *rex* or Greek βασιλεύς).[10] According to Coulanges, the father had ultimate and unlimited power over the members of his house.[11] A woman was thus considered a "*mineure*"—a minor with absolutely no household authority.[12]

The third figure is the American anthropologist and lawyer Lewis Henry Morgan. In his 1877 anthropological classic *Ancient Society*, Morgan links the patriarchal family type of the Greeks and Romans, with its characteristic paternal power and the concomitant servitude of other family members, to the family type of the "Hebrew tribes."[13] Morgan's developmental scheme, including his views about paternal power, influenced Marxist doctrines that in turn influenced second-wave feminism.[14]

Not long after these scholars published their influential works, the prominent German historian and theologian Bernhard Stade published a large-scale history of ancient Israel.[15] The two-volume *Geschichte des Volkes Israel* (1887–88), which became the standard history of ancient Israel for generations, is a social as much as a political history and is probably the first work by a biblical scholar to use the terms "patriarchy" and "patriarchal society" to refer to ancient Israel. The strong influence of social-science theorists, especially Fustel de Coulange, is evident in this work. Following Fustel, Stade asserts that, like the Roman *patria potestas*, the Israelite *pater familias* had a great deal of power.[16] His reconstruction of Israelite society and religion had a significant impact on biblical scholarship, especially in Germany, where Wellhausen was among those whom he influenced.

The Patriarchy Model in Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Research on Ancient Israel

While some leading nineteenth-century biblical scholars realized the potential of

anthropological research for understanding Israelite society, the majority of scholars did not engage the social sciences until the second wave emerged in the mid-twentieth century.[17] Scholarship in this wave focused mainly on prophecy and apocalyptic movements. Still, some scholars, like Roland de Vaux, did examine family structures.[18] De Vaux's prestigious work repeats assumptions of first-wave social-scientific biblical scholarship about the patriarchal family. He asserts: "There is no doubt that … the Israelite family is patriarchal" and that men were masters of their wives and children—even sometimes the "power of life and death."[19] Similarly, Rafael Patai's 1960 book, *Family Love and the Bible*, also subscribes to the patriarchal model, with the father ruling the family.[20] Major reference works of this era offer similar statements: the "Family" entry in the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (1976) refers to the patriarchal family, "ruled by the authority of the father";[21] and the "אָב *'ābh*" ("father") entry in the first volume (1974) of the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* refers to the "almost unlimited authority" of the father in Israelite families.[22]

Although relatively few mid-twentieth-century biblical scholars drew on anthropology, many more turned to sociology. Probably influenced by the chapter on "Patriarchalism and Patrimonialism" in Max Weber's *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (*Economy and Society*), these scholars began to use patriarchy in its extended sense, to refer to society-wide male dominance.[23] Weber became perhaps the most significant social theorist for Hebrew Bible studies.[24] For example, Martin Noth's *Geschichte Israels* (1950), considered a standard publication on Israelite history for generations, explains that the "family was subject to the *patria potestas*" and that the "social order in Israel was patriarchal."[25] Somewhat later, Norman Gottwald's influential *The Tribes of Yahweh* (1979) refers to the patriarchal nature of the Israelite extended family (*bêt 'āb*) and the "pervasively patriarchal" character of Semitic culture.[26] Both examples use patriarchy in reference to the family and also to society as a whole.

Adherence to the patriarchal model did abate somewhat by the late twentieth century, perhaps because studies of women's roles in ancient Israel began to contest aspects of the patriarchy paradigm. For example, the entry on "Family" in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (1992) disputes the notion that fathers had absolute authority and rejects the idea that they wielded life-death power over their children.[27] Similarly, *The Social World of Ancient Israel* (1993) recognizes significant maternal "power and authority" in household decisions.[28] The chapter on the monarchic period in the 1997 book, *Families in Ancient Israel*,

repudiates both the general notion of paternal supremacy and the idea of the father's life-death powers.[29] The 2003 book *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World* also takes to task interpreters who consider certain biblical narratives to be "normal expressions of patriarchy," asserting that "father" does *not* mean "ruler," and proposing that the term patriarchy be avoided altogether.[30]

Yet even at the beginning of the twenty-first century, some scholars still adhere to the patriarchal model. For example, *Life in Biblical Israel* (2001) calls the Israelite family patriarchal, with family authority residing with the *paterfamilias*;[31] and the entry on "Family Relationships" in the Pentateuch volume (2003) of the *Dictionary of the Old Testament* has a section on "Patriarchy" that refers to the *paterfamilias*.[32] Both sources evoke the old patriarchal model based on classical texts. Likewise, the article on households in the *New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (2006) calls Israelite households "formally patriarchal" with the senior male holding power over household members.[33]

The contestation of the patriarchal model in social scientific scholarship in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has not significantly influenced the work of feminist biblical scholarship. Many feminist scholars have thus continued to appeal to traditional patriarchal models. For example, the otherwise balanced *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (1992) repeatedly refers to Israelite patriarchy in an article on women in the Old Testament.[34] Similarly, the introduction to *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader* (1999) asserts that biblical texts "function to preserve patriarchal society."[35] Perhaps the sharpest assertion of Israelite patriarchy is Esther Fuch's claim that biblical texts are "anchored in a particular ideology of male domination" and promote a "male-supremacist social and cognitive system" in *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative* (2000).[36] Kathleen O'Connor's 2006 essay on gender and the Bible also reports that the social, economic, and political systems of ancient Israel were patriarchal and hierarchical, working to "benefit men directly and to benefit their families *only* [my emphasis] at the father's pleasure."[37] Finally, the introduction to the new (2012) edition of the *Women's Bible Commentary* refers to the "patriarchal assumptions" of the society around the texts.[38]

The patriarchy model appropriated by these feminist biblical scholars is the expanded version, namely a system of pervasive male privilege and dominance in both the family and society. Their critiques follow the second-wave feminists who insisted that patriarchy is not restricted to the anthropological concept of the father's absolute power in family life, but represents "the social structures and

ideologies that have enabled men to dominate and exploit wo/men throughout recorded history."[39] In her widely read but deeply flawed book, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Gerda Lerner defines patriarchy as "male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society."[40] In the discourse of feminist theorists, patriarchy came to mean the "domination of all men over all women."[41] Many feminist biblical scholars followed suit.

In sum, the nineteenth-century and twentieth-century social-science concepts of patriarchy appropriated by Hebrew Bible scholars are still influential today. References to patriarchy, *paterfamilias*, and *pater potestas* continue to appear in feminist biblical scholarship, as does the notion of all-inclusive male dominance and concomitant female victimhood. Even those who acknowledge that women exercised power and authority in households, as some did in their communities, do not explicitly critique the patriarchal model.

But, is this persistent appeal to the patriarchal model justified? Recent developments in three areas, studies of classical society, research on Israelite women, and third-wave feminist theory call into question its validity for representing Israelite society.[42]

Challenges to the Patriarchy Paradigm in Classical Studies

Since the patriarchy model originated in analyses of ancient Greek and Latin sources, challenges to this scholarship is significant. Already in the 1960s, the classicist John A. Crook noted that the "all-powerful *pater familias* of Rome … is too crude a figure to correspond to the nuances of reality."[43] Perhaps most important was the realization that different areas of household life cannot be lumped together; that is, male control in one area does not necessarily mean control in all areas.[44] Another development came several decades later, when the father's life-and-death power was shown to be an abstract concept and "not a fact of social history."[45]

Perhaps the most thorough discrediting came in the 1990s, when it became clear that new knowledge about the social realities and cultural representations of classical civilizations would not support traditional depictions of patriarchy in ancient Greek and Roman society. Roman historian Richard Saller has been

instrumental in this regard.[46] He recognized that many nineteenth-century theorists had legal training (e.g., Maine and Morgan, mentioned above) and drew on ancient *legal* texts, which they erroneously believed functioned as do European and American legal systems. By ignoring other sources, they missed information about social reality: *non-legal* texts reveal that fathers do *not* exercise absolute authority in all aspects of daily life. Rather, "The stark image of the severe all-powerful, despotic father and husband" is an exaggerated, misunderstood, and misleading legal construct that "too easily ignores the complexities of human relationships in everyday life."[47] Indeed, that image is the "stuff of legendary caricature, not to be mistaken for sociological description."[48] In short, it is a "gross oversimplification to represent Roman fathers as endowed with unlimited power."[49] Not even the ancient Romans themselves viewed the family as "an extreme, wholly asymmetrical patriarchy that placed all power in the hands of the father."[50]

Moreover, while Roman fathers had considerable authority over children, they did not have absolute authority over wives. In fact, in the Roman texts putative life-death powers over wives are never mentioned. Thus, the term patriarchy does not apply to the husband–wife relationship.[51] The gendered term *paterfamilias* obscures the relative empowerment of at least some women.[52] Indeed, elite Roman women often managed property and exercised power over their households.[53] Note that Xenophon's treatise on household management presents the economic roles of wife and husband as complementary, with a woman having household authority and sometimes even "exercising authority over her marital partner."[54] That depiction finds support in the work of third-wave feminist archaeologists, whose analyses of Roman and Greek household space challenge the traditional concept of sequestered powerless women by providing evidence of female control of significant aspects of household life.[55] They have shown that capitalist Victorian household patterns, in which the workplace was outside the home and men had control over wives and children dependent on their earnings, had been superimposed on premodern societies in which the household was the workplace for all family members.

Classicists also challenged the expanded view of patriarchy as absolute male control over society-wide institutions. Men undeniably had more numerous and more visible roles in community life. But this reality did not categorically exclude women from leadership roles. Religious roles in particular have been the subject of considerable research. Ancient Greek women took part in public religious activities, arguably an arena of politics, and held important positions in

certain cults or festivals.[56] Roman women were also participants or officiants in mainstream public cults, not simply marginal women's cults.[57] Archaeological materials, iconography, and inscriptions depict women in many other extra-household roles that are virtually invisible in texts.[58]

To be clear, classical scholarship does not claim equality for women. Rather it contests the validity of the patriarchy model. It draws on nineteenth-century scholarship that uses limited legal sources to portray classical households and society.

Challenges to the Patriarchy Paradigm in Studies of Israelite Women: The Household and the Wider Community

Like classical sources, the Hebrew Bible is largely the product of urban male elites, not the 90 percent who were rural agriculturalists. However, unlike the numerous classical sources spanning centuries, the Hebrew Bible is a single, albeit composite, source that took shape centuries after the existence of the society it depicts. Studying Israelite society, especially family life, means using biblical materials but also relying heavily on archaeological data because family life receives little attention in biblical literature. Moreover, archaeological evidence often supplements or even challenges biblical texts. As Peggy Day insists: "The text may claim to speak for the culture, but it is neither coextensive with nor equivalent to the culture."[59]

Relevant archaeological materials come from households, where women *and* men experienced daily life. However, raw archaeological data does not indicate the dynamics of household life. Rather, archaeological findings must be interpreted. For instance, archaeologists who uncover ancient household tools must consult ethnography, texts, and iconography to determine whether women or men used the tools. Further, assessing how women's tasks were valued relies on evidence from traditional societies, not contemporary industrialized societies.[60] These procedures are provided by gender archaeology, which seeks to identify aspects of ancient gendered life by redirecting the traditional focus on men's activities to those of women.[61] In discovering the relationships of women with others, gender archaeology often contests facile claims, based *only* on texts, about female subordination. In so doing, common assumptions about social

systems are also disputed.[62]

What did women contribute to household life? The tasks of women and men overlapped but were not the same. Women were responsible for "maintenance activities," the set of "practices and experiences concerning the sustenance, welfare, and long-term reproduction" of the household.[63] These practices are the basic tasks of daily life and many required specialized knowledge that were essential to regulate and stabilize both household and community life.[64] They include economic, social, political, and religious activities, far too many to be considered in this essay.[65] The focus here will be on women's economic activities, many of which leave traces in the archaeological record.

Economic activities were an integral part of household life in ancient Israel as in all traditional agrarian societies. Women were largely responsible for food processing, textile production, and making various household installations, implements, and containers.[66] Their tasks were time-consuming and physically demanding. They were also technologically sophisticated, and their work likely garnered them respect since it required more skill than men's. Because they could transform the raw into the cooked and produce other essential commodities, women were perceived as having the ability to "work … wonders."[67]

Women's roles in commodity production were essential for household survival. Ethnographic evidence strongly suggests that when women dominate indispensable household processes, they are positioned to exercise household power.[68] Those responsible for preparing life-sustaining food, for example, have a say in household activities relating to both production and consumption.[69] They also control allocation of household space and implements.[70]

In short, depending on their age and experience, Israelite women were household managers, supervising the assignment of tasks and the use of resources. To put it another way, senior women functioned as household COOs (Chief Operating Officers).[71] They were hardly oppressed and powerless; nor were they subordinate to male control in all aspects of household life. In subsistence households in traditional societies like ancient Israel, when women and men both make significant economic contributions to the household, female-male relationships are marked by interdependence or mutual dependence. Thus for many, but not all, Israelite household processes, the marital union would have been a partnership with men dominating some aspects, women others.

Numerous biblical texts support this conclusion. Two legal stipulations (Exod. 21:15, 17; cf. Prov 20:20) mandate capital punishment for offspring,

presumably adult children in complex families, who strike or curse their parents. In these instances, the household authority of both parents is upheld.[72] The narrative about Micah's mother in Judges 17 depicts a senior woman making decisions and commissioning cultic objects for the household shrine. The narrative about Abigail (1 Samuel 25) shows a woman with access to resources that she uses cleverly to save her household from David's wrath. She acts on her own initiative, without consulting her husband, gives orders to household servants, and speaks with the diplomatic rhetoric of a woman accustomed to being in charge. In the Shunammite narrative (2 Kgs. 4:8–37; 8:1–6), the nameless woman autonomously invites the prophet Elisha to her household, reconfigures household space, moves her family because of drought, interacts readily with both king and prophet, and negotiates the restoration of lost property. Finally, in Proverbs 31:10–31, the "strong woman" (NRSV) "capable wife" is portrayed as an efficient and successful household manager, acting with acumen in economic processes.

Gender archaeology and biblical texts thus together provide compelling evidence for the managerial power of Israelite women in the household. Further, *bêt ʾēm* ("mother's household") as a counterpart to *bêt ʾāb* ("father's household") appears in several women-centered passages thus suggesting women's household authority.[73] The term patriarchy, as a designation of general male domination and the oppression of women, is therefore inappropriate and inaccurate. Identifying female agency challenges the idea that all women were helpless victims of a male-dominant system.[74]

A similar case, based on biblical texts, can be made for women's community roles.[75] We see that women were not excluded from all professional positions. Their roles were in fact numerous and varied, with about twenty different ones mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. Some women apparently held leadership positions such as judge (Judg. 4:4–5) and sage (2 Sam. 14:1–20; 20:14–22). Further, several royal women, because of their class, exercised political power as *gĕbîrâ* ("great lady"; e.g., 1 Kgs. 15:11; Jer. 13:18; 29:2). In the cultural realm women were: poets, with poems and songs attributed to women (Deborah, Miriam, Hannah, Lemuel's mother in Proverbs, the woman in Canticles); performers, with references to female singers, dancers, and instrumentalists (e.g., Exod. 15:2–21; 1 Sam. 18:6–7; 2 Sam. 19:35 [Heb. 19:36]; Eccl. 2:8; Jer. 31:4); and lamenters (e.g., Jer. 9:17–20 [Heb. 9:16–19]). Some of these cultural activities were secular, but others (e.g., victory songs praising God's salvific acts) were religious. Other religious activities included: menial tasks (Exod. 38:8 and 1 Sam. 2:22, which mention women at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting),

cultic ceremonies (Ezek. 8:16–17, where women together with priests perform a complex of ritual activities), and prophecy (Deborah, Miriam, Huldah, Noadiah, and two unnamed ones in Isa. 8:3; Joel 2:28 [Heb. 3:10]).[76]

Most of these professional women possessed considerable expertise and made significant contributions to their communities. They were not dominated or controlled by male hierarchies. Moreover, those who worked within female cohorts (i.e., performers, lamenters, certain prophets) had their own hierarchies, with senior women or those with greatest expertise directing and teaching less skilled women or apprentices. Thus, the society-wide designation patriarchy, implying that women were completely excluded from community positions in ancient Israel, is also inappropriate and incorrect.

Feminist Critiques: Challenges to the Patriarchy Paradigm

Many third-wave feminist scholars, social theorists, and gender or feminist archaeologists also have concerns about the patriarchy model. Their discussions of patriarchy, which aim to correct the essentialist, absolutist, and dichotomizing tendencies of second-wave theorists, are too extensive to be recounted here. Yet, some of the more salient issues can be noted. One fundamental problem is that the patriarchy model rests on a naturalized view of women as inferior to men. It assumes that women are thus incapable of making decisions, controlling resources, or providing leadership. For instance, Weber linked male dominance to "the normal superiority of the physical and intellectual energies of the male."[77] Moreover, Weber's notion of biological paternity, forming the foundation of society-wide dominance, is neither necessary nor universal.[78] The patriarchy model assumes that household dynamics are monolithic although specific forms of male dominance cannot be generalized as indicators of total male control. Feminist archaeologists document the disconnection between putative ideologies of male dominance and the diversity and fluidity of actual gender practices.[79] The remains of such flawed essentialist views underlie current notions of patriarchy, weakening the legitimacy of the model.

Another, closely related problem is the assumption of patriarchy's universality. This argument maintains that patriarchy exists everywhere, across time and space. Ethnographers, however, show that the range of women's activities and the degree of their social and economic power varies enormously

across cultures.[80] The idea of absolute male dominance cannot be uncritically superimposed on all societies as a universal condition. In this sense, the patriarchy model renders the past as static. The model superimposes the notion of fixed sets of statuses and relationships upon a lived reality that inevitably involved subtle and shifting patterns. Similarly, it renders invisible the multiple ways in which women are social actors even though those ways are not always visible in a society's normative documents. Actual gender practices are distinct from patriarchal gender ideology, if there even is such a thing.[81]

Yet another problem of the patriarchy model is that it rests on a male/female dichotomy. When concepts of sexuality as a binary are deconstructed and wider variability and fluidity in sexual identity and practices are acknowledged, the root binary of patriarchy is disrupted.[82] Since this model also involves a one-dimensional concentration on gender in its characterization of both families and societies, it neglects other forms of social asymmetry, including social class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, or age that disadvantage both men and women. Feminist theorists thus emphasize that the analysis of power relations requires taking the complex intersection of the various dimensions of a person's identity into account and acknowledging the subordinate status of many men and women in relation to these other categories.[83]

Finally, the application of the patriarchy label to traditional societies accepts the values of capitalist societies that valorize male individuality. The importance of women's social and economic contributions to traditional societies, which are much less individualistic, goes unacknowledged.[84] This approach also encodes a belief in the cultural superiority of modern democracies.[85] Moreover, invoking patriarchy means considering women helpless victims, thus effacing the many ways in which women circumvent or foil male mechanisms of power.[86]Altogether, these problems mean that the discourse of patriarchy requires a "feminist, post-structuralist overhaul."[87] A far more complex model is required to represent the mutable dynamics of the lived experiences of individuals across the social and political spectrum.[88]

Conclusion: Another Model

Much biblical scholarship, especially but not exclusively feminist biblical scholarship, still considers ancient Israel patriarchal. Moreover, although rarely articulated, using the term patriarchy for the Israelites typically assumes both

male dominance of the household and male control of society-wide functions. Largely unrecognized is the fact that the patriarchy model, which was formed by nineteenth- to early twentieth-century anthropologists using classical sources, has not held up well in classical studies. Also, close examination of the roles of Israelite women, using the interpretive processes of gender archaeology and the evidence of certain biblical texts, indicates that the patriarchy model occludes significant domains of female agency in household and society-wide contexts in ancient Israel. Moreover, third-wave feminist theorists have identified many significant problems with the patriarchy model.

The patriarchy model is not flexible enough to accommodate the reality of daily household activities and interactions. It interferes with attempts to understand the complex gendered patterns of life in ancient Israel and in so doing presents an unduly negative view of women's lives in the biblical past. Moreover, this model obscures the existence of groups such as servants, slaves, and non-Israelites whose members often led far more circumscribed lives than did most women. But let me be clear: eschewing the patriarchy model does not mean claiming that there was gender equality in ancient Israel. Israelite patrilineality, for example, clearly favored men in the transmission of a household's inheritance across generations through male lines, a pattern that underlies the male control of female sexuality in biblical texts and also in traditional societies.[89] But patrilineality is not the same as patriarchy.[90] Additionally, male control of female sexuality does not mean male control of adult women in every aspect of household or community life. In short, male dominance was real; but it was fragmentary, not hegemonic.[91]

It is time to acknowledge that patriarchy is a Western, constructed concept, not a "social law" nor an immutable feature of all societies. As a constructed model, it is an oversimplification and systematization of data used for comparative purposes. As for all such models, new information can and should mean that it has outlived its usefulness.[92] The patriarchy model is an inadequate and misleading designation of the social reality of ancient Israel and thus no longer provides a valid heuristic representation of Israelite society.

If the patriarchy model is no longer appropriate, is there another social-science model that can better accommodate the diversity of women's experiences and acknowledge their control of some household and society-wide functions? Let me suggest a more recent social-science model, but first it is important to recognize that patriarchy is a hierarchical system. In hierarchies, elements are subordinate to others and are ranked accordingly; thus they can be represented as conical vertical structures, giving rise to phrases like "moving up

in the hierarchy."[93]

Recognizing that not all social systems are organized hierarchically, some social scientists offer a more nuanced and adaptable model: *heterarchy*.[94] This concept can account for the existence of multiple sources of power in past societies. With respect to gender, it can incorporate arenas of activity in which women have power and agency as well as the intersection of gender with other variables like age and class.[95] It can remedy many of the flaws, noted above, in the hierarchical (patriarchal) model. For example, it does not assume that ranking is permanent or that rankings of elements according to different criteria always coincide. Rather, it accommodates a variety of organizational patterns across cultures and acknowledges different rankings of structures or their elements. Consequently, the heterarchy model has been productively employed by gender archaeologists among others.

It is important to note that the heterarchy model concedes the existence of hierarchies but does not situate them all in a linear pattern. Rather it acknowledges that different power structures exist simultaneously in any given society, with each having its own hierarchical arrangements that may cross-cut each other laterally. A heterarchical society can be composed of various units including individuals, households, professionals, village communities, and kinship groups. Each unit is involved in multiple horizontal as well as vertical relationships. This interweaving of differently structured relationships means that an individual, an Israelite woman in an agrarian household for example, can rank high in one modality but low in another. The maintenance activities and social structures of ancient Israel meant that daily life was rarely structured according to fixed, hierarchical gender patterns. Each woman's position would vary over time, according to other factors, such as age and participation in community activities. Also, certain systems in which women held professional positions would have had their own hierarchies and cultural authority.

Heterarchy thus provides a compelling model for representing ancient Israelite society**.** It allows for a more nuanced and probably more accurate view of ancient Israel than does patriarchy. It provides a view that acknowledges significant domains of female agency and power while still recognizing male control of many social and political functions. Far more flexible than patriarchy, heterarchy is a heuristic tool that can better accommodate, at least for now, the complexity of gender dynamics and thereby acknowledge that Israelite women were not dominated in *all* aspects of Israelite society but rather were autonomous actors in multiple aspects of household and community life.

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[1] This chapter is adapted from the author’s “Was Ancient Israel a Patriarchal Society?,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 133.1 (2014): 8–27. It is used here with permission.

[2] “Patriarchy” did not become the designation of a social or political form until the seventeenth century; see http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=patriarchy&allowed_in_frame=0.

[3] See, e.g., Majella Franzmann, *Women and Religion* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7–8. Also see Maggie Humm, *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University, 1990), 159–61.

[4] See, e.g., http://www.thefreedictionary.com/patriarchy; http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/446604/patriarchy.

[5] See John W. Rogerson, *Anthropology and the Old Testament* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), 1–21; Philip F. Esler and Anselm C. Hagedorn, “Social-Scientific Analysis of the Old Testament: A Brief History and Overview,” in *Ancient Israel: The Old Testament in Its Social Context*, ed. Philip F. Esler (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2006), 15–33.

[6] See Robert R. Wilson, “Reflections on Social-Scientific Criticism,” in *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David. L. Petersen*, ed. Joel M. LeMon and Kent Harold Richards (Society of Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Study; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 505–22.

[7] Henry Sumner Maine, *Ancient Law: Its Connection with the Early History of Society, and Its Relation to Modern Ideas* (New York, NY: Henry Holt, 1873; first published London: John Murray, 1861), 130.

[8] Ibid., 133–34.

[9] Denis Fustel de Coulanges, *La cité antique: Étude sur le culte, le droit, les institutions de la Grèce et de Rome* (tenth ed.; Paris: Hachette, 1883).

[10] Ibid., 98.

[11] Ibid., 106.

[12] Ibid., 94.

[13] *Ancient Society; or, Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery, through Barbarism to Civilization* (New York, NY: Holt, 1877), 466, 468–70.

[14] See Catherine J. Nash, "Patriarchy," in *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, ed. Rob Kitchin (San Diego, CA: Elsevier, 2009), 102–103. It is common to speak of three successive feminist movements: first-wave feminism, accompanying the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century suffragist movement; second-wave feminism, beginning with the 1960s civil rights movement and continuing into the 1980s; and third-wave feminism, emerging along with postcolonial and post-modern theory in the 1990s and continuing to the present. Three phases of feminist biblical scholarship are linked to these three waves. See, e.g., Ahida E. Pilarski, "The Past and Future of Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 41 (2011): 16–23.

[15] Bernhard Stade, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel* (2 Vols.; Berlin: Grote, 1887–88).

[16] Ibid., 390–95; see also Rogerson, *Anthropology*, 14–15.

[17] An exception is Louis Wallis, who calls the Israelite family patriarchal, with the father ruling; see his *Sociological Study of the Bible* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1912), 41.

[18] *Les Institutions de l'Ancien Testament* (2 Vols.; Paris: Cerf, 1958–60), published in English as *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Culture* (trans. John McHugh; New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 1961) and reprinted by Eerdmans (1997).

[19] See De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 20, who invokes life-death language in reference to Gen. 38:24, where Judah condemns his daughter-in-law to death.

[20] Rafael Patai, *Family, Love and the Bible* (London: Macgibbon & Kee, 1960), 114–24.

[21] O. J. Baab, "Family," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* 2:238, 240.

[22] Helmer Ringgren, "אָב *'ābh*," *TDOT* 1:8. The series appeared first in German in 1970.

[23] Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Vol. 2; ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich; trans. Ephraim Fischoff et al.; Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA / London: University of California Press, 1978; originally published in German in 1921–22), 1007–69. This was arguably the twentieth century's most important sociological book; see http://www.isa-sociology.org/books/vt/bkv_000.htm.

[24] So John F. Priest, "Social Science Methods," in *Methods of Biblical Interpretation*, excerpted from the *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. John H. Hayes (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2004), 282; and Rainer Kessler, *The Social History of Ancient Israel: An Introduction* (trans. Linda M. Maloney; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2008), 8–12.

[25] Martin Noth, *The History of Israel* (trans. Stanley Godman and Peter Ackroyd from the second German ed. [1954]; second ed.; New York, NY: Harper, 1960; first German ed., 1950), 108. A new German edition was published by Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht in 2011.

[26] Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250–1050 BC* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979), 315, 745 n. 206.

[27] Christopher J. H. Wright, "Family," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 2:767.

[28] Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel 1250–587 BCE* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 23. However, the term patriarchy is still used.

[29] Joseph Blenkinsopp, "The Family in First Temple Israel," in Leo G. Perdue, Joseph Blenkinsopp, John J. Collins, and Carol Meyers, *Families in Ancient Israel*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 70. Blenkinsopp doubts that the narrator is interested in "legal verisimilitude."

[30] Daniel I. Bloch, "Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel," in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, ed. Ken M. Campbell (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 41.

[31] Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (Library of Ancient Israel; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 36, 38. Yet they acknowledge that fathers could not execute offspring (38) and that mothers had some household authority (50).

[32] Victor H. Matthews, "Family Relationships," *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 293–94.

[33] Warren Carter, "Households, Householders," *New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* 4:903.

[34] Phyllis A. Bird, "Women: Old Testament," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 6:951–97.

[35] Alice Bach, "Introduction—Man's World, Woman's Place: Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible," in *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader*, ed. Alice Bach (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999), xiv.

[36] Esther Fuchs, *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative: Reading the Bible as a Woman* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 12–13.

[37] Kathleen M. O'Connor, "The Feminist Movement Meets the Old Testament," in *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World: An Introduction to Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Honor of Katherine Doob Sakenfeld*, ed. Linda Day and Carolyn Pressler (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 13–14.

[38] Sharon H. Ringe, "When Women Interpret the Bible," in *Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley (third ed.; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 3–4.

[39] See Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001), 115.

[40] Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (Women and History 1; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986), 239. For a penetrating critique of Lerner, see Susan Kray, "'New Mode of Feminist Historical Analysis'— Or Just Another Collusion with 'Patriarchal' Bias?", *Shofar* 20 (2002): 66–90.

[41] See Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 212.

[42] Anthropologists too have challenged the nineteenth-century patriarchal model. For instance, Maine's theory is "fully discredited;" see, e.g., Alan Diamond, '"Introduction," in *The Victorian Achievement of Sir Henry Maine: A Centennial Reappraisal*, ed. Alan Diamond (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 4.

[43] John A. Crook, "Patria Potestas," *The Classical Quarterly* 17 (1967): 122.

[44] Ibid., 113–14.

[45] Yan Thomas, "*Vitae necisque potestas*: Le père, la cité, la mort," in *Du châtiment dans la cité. Supplices corporels et peine de mort dans le monde antique*, ed. Yan Thomas (Collection de l'École

française de Rome 79; Roma: École française de Rome, 1984), 500, 512, 545.

[46] Richard P. Saller, *Patriarchy, Property and Death in the Roman Family* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1994), esp. chap. 5, "*Pietas* and *patria potestas*: Obligation and Power in the Roman Household." Suzanne Dixon reaches similar conclusions; see her *The Roman Family* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

[47] Saller, *Patriarchy, Property*, 2.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid., 72. See also Dixon, *Roman Family*, 147, 160.

[50] Saller, *Patriarchy*, *Property*, 228.

[51] Ibid., 129.

[52] Ibid., 186–87; Dixon, *Roman Family*, 151.

[53] Richard Saller, "*Pater Familias*, *Mater Familias*, and the Gendered Semantics of the Roman Household," *Classical Philology* 94 (1999): 196.

[54] Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Xenophon, Oeconomicus: A Social and Historical Commentary with a New English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 34, 36, 247.

[55] Suzanne M. Spencer-Wood, "Feminist Gender Research in Classical Archaeology," in *Women in Antiquity: Theoretical Approaches to Gender and Archaeology*, ed. Sarah Milledge Nelson (Gender and Archaeology Series 11; Lanham, MD: AltaMira, 2007), 282–84. See also Lisa C. Nevett, *Domestic Space in Classical Antiquity* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Marilyn W. Goldberg, "Spatial and Behavioural Negotation in Classical Athenian City Houses," in *The Archaeology of Household Activities*, ed. Penelope M. Allison (London: Routledge, 1999), 142–61.

[56] Matthew Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion* (London: Routledge, 2002), 7–106.

[57] Celia E. Schultz, *Women's Religious Activity in the Roman Republic* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Ariadne Staple, *From Good Goddess to Vestal Virgins: Sex and Category in Roman Religion* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1998).

[58] Ibid., 303–307.

[59] Peggy L. Day, "Introduction," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy L. Day (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1989), 5.

[60] On the use of ethnographic analogies, see Carol Meyers, "Double Vision: Textual and Archaeological Images of Women," *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 5.2 (2016): 112–31.

[61] See Carol Meyers, "Engendering Syro-Palestinian Archaeology: Reasons and Resources," *Near Eastern Archaeology* (2003): 185–97. *Gender archaeology* is sometimes used synonymously with *feminist archaeology*, a term specifically aligned with feminist epistemologies. See Mary Louise Stig Sørensen, "Feminist Archaeology," 116–21; Sarah Milledge Nelson, "Gender Archaeology," in *Archaeology: The Key Concepts*, ed. Colin Renfrew and Paul Bahn (London: Routledge, 2005), 127–33.

[62] See Janet E. Levy**,** "Gender, Heterarchy, and Hierarchy," in *Women in Antiquity: Theoretical Approaches to Gender and Archaeology*, ed. Sarah Milledge Nelson (Gender and Archaeology Series 11; Lanham, MD: AltaMira, 2007), 192.

[63] See Paloma González-Marcén, Sandra Montón-Subías, and Marina Picazo, "Towards an Archaeology of Maintenance Activities," in *Engendering Social Dynamics: The Archaeology of Maintenance Activities*, ed. Sandra Montón-Subías and Margarita Sánchez-Romero (BAR International Series 1862; Oxford: Archaeopress, 2008), 3–8.

[64] Ibid., 3.

[65] For detailed information about these activities, see Carol Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 125–70.

[66] Ibid., 127–35.

[67] Jack Goody, *Cooking, Class, and Cuisine: A Study in Comparative Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 70.

[68] Carole M. Counihan, "Introduction—Food, and Gender: Identity and Power," in *Food and Identity: Gender and Power*, ed. Carole M. Counihan and Stephen L. Kaplan (Amsterdam: Harwood, 1998), 2, 4.

[69] See Julia A. Henson, "The Engendered Household," in *Women in Antiquity: Theoretical Approaches to Gender and Archaeology*, ed. Sarah Milledge Nelson (Gender and Archaeology Series 11; Lanham, MD: AltaMira, 2007), 143.

[70] Yizhar Hirschfeld, "The Traditional Palestinian House: Results of a Survey in the Hebron Hills," chap. in *The Palestinian Dwelling in the A Roman-Byzantine Period* (Collectio minor, Studium Biblicum Franciscanum 34; Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press and Israel Exploration Society, 1995), 152, 182.

[71] They probably acted as CEOs if the senior male was away or incapacitated; see David E. S. Stein, ed., *The Contemporary Torah: A Gender-Sensitive Adaptation of the JPS Translation* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 2006), 403.

[72] These stipulations probably originated in village (not urban) life; see Douglas A. Knight, *Law Power, and Justice in Ancient Israel* (Library of Ancient Israel; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 128–29.

[73] Gen. 24:28; Ruth 1:8; Cant. 3:4; 8:2; 2 Kgs. 8:3; Prov. 9:1; 14:1; 31:21, 27. See Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 112–13.

[74] See Sarah Milledge Nelson, *Gender in Archaeology: Analyzing Power and Prestige* (second ed.; Gender and Archaeology 9; Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2004), 154.

[75] For more detail, see Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 171–79.

[76] Wilda C. Gafney, *Daughters of Miriam: Women Prophets in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2008), 160–65. Presumably many other female prophets are subsumed under the masculine plural *nĕbî'îm* or "prophets." While Ezek. 13:17–23 depicts women prophets negatively, the poem probably reflects a time when female prophets were highly regarded specialists. See Jonathan Stökl, "The מתנבאות in Ezekiel 13 Reconsidered," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 132 (2013): 61–76.

[77] Weber, *Economy and Society*, 1007.

[78] Vrushali Patil, "From Patriarchy to Intersectionality: A Transnational Feminist Assessment of How Far We've Really Come," *SIGNS* 38 (2013): 854–55. Also see Julia Adams, "The Rule of the Father: Patriarchy and Patrimonialism in Early Modern Europe," in *Max Weber's Economy and Society: A Critical Companion*, ed. Charles Camic, Philip Gorski, and David Trubek (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 240–41.

[79] E.g., Suzanne M. Spencer-Wood, "Feminist Theory and Gender Research in Historical Archaeology," in *Women in Antiquity: Theoretical Approaches to Gender and Archaeology*, ed. Sarah Milledge Nelson (Gender and Archaeology Series 11; Lanham, MD: AltaMira, 2007), 52–54.

[80] See, e.g., Patil, "From Patriarchy to Intersectionality," 850–51.

[81] Spencer-Wood, "Feminist Theory and Gender Research," 51.

[82] So, e.g., ibid., 46.

[83] Patil, “From Patriarchy to Intersectionality,” 850. See also Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 116–17.

[84] Almudena Hernando, “Why Did History Not Appreciate Maintenance Activities?,” in *Engendering Social Dynamics: The Archaeology of Maintenance Activities*, ed. Sandra Montón-Subías and Margarita Sánchez-Romero (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2008), 12–13. Cf. the discussion of collective identity in ancient Israel in Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 118–21.

[85] For instance, Aihwa Ong objects to the modernist binary of unfree tradition versus free modernity; see her “Colonialism and Modernity: Feminist Re-presentations of Women in Non-Western Societies,” *Inscriptions* 3–4 (1988): 79–93.

[86] Noted already by second-wave feminists: e.g., Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, “Introduction,” in Woman, Culture, and Society, ed. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974), 2, 9–10.

[87] Adams, “The Rule of the Father,” 254.

[88] Anna Pollert, “Gender and Class Revisited; or, the Poverty of ‘Patriarchy,’” *Sociology* 30 (1996): 640.

[89] Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 200–201. In agrarian societies, in which a household’s livelihood depends on its property, the acute need for men to be sure their offspring are their own is manifest in regulations giving men control of female sexuality. Biblical legal stipulations concerning virginity, adultery, prostitution, levirate marriage, and childbirth seek to assure that property remains within the male lineage; even Gen. 3:16 (“he shall rule over you”) likely concerns sexual control and not absolute male dominance (see Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 95–102). Tikveh Frymer-Kensky notes that Deuteronomic laws are fair to women except in matters of sexuality; see her “Deuteronomy,” in *Women’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (second ed.; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 591.

[90] Françoise Zonabend, “An Anthropological Perspective on Kinship and the Family,” in *A History of the Family*, ed. André Burguière, Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, Martine Segalen, and Françoise Zonabend (trans. Sarah Hanbury Tenison, Rosemary Morris, and Andrew Wilson; Vol. 1: *Distant Worlds, Ancient Worlds*; Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 43.

[91] See Sherry B. Ortner, *Making Gender: The Politics and Erotics of Culture* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1996), 172–76.

[92] See Philip F. Esler, “Social-Scientific Models in Biblical Interpretation,” in **Ancient Israel: The Old Testament in its Social Context**, ed. Philip F. Esler (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 3–4.

[93] Carole L Crumley, “Heterarchy and the Analysis of Complex Societies,” in *Heterarchy and the Analysis of Complex Societies*, ed. Robert Ehrenreich, Carole L. Crumley, Carole L., and Janet E. Levy (Archaeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association 6; Arlington, VA: American Anthropological Association, 1995), 2–3.

[94] See Carol Meyers, “Hierarchy or Heterarchy? Archaeology and the Theorizing of Israelite Society,” in *Confronting the Past: Archaeological and Historical Essays in Honor of William G. Dever*, ed. Seymour Gitin, J. P. Dessel, and J. Edward Wright (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns: 2006), 249–51; Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 196–99; Levy, “Gender, Heterarchy, and Hierarchy.”

[95] Ibid.

CHAPTER 28

RETRIEVING THE HISTORY OF WOMEN BIBLICAL INTERPRETERS

JOY A. SCHROEDER

The number of women biblical scholars has multiplied exponentially since the 1980s, offering rich contributions in feminist, womanist, and global approaches to biblical interpretation. Most people, however, are unaware of these women's forerunners and the rich history of women's biblical interpretation prior to the early twentieth century. Through the centuries, Jewish, Christian, and secular women have studied and commented upon scripture. These women left behind writings that interpreted biblical texts for scholarly, devotional, or popular audiences. Countless others left no writings, or their works were lost to time. But traces of their thought were recorded by authors who admired or hated them. Finally, women also interpreted scripture through artworks and artistic patronage. Retrieving these voices requires creative and careful approaches and strategies.

This essay examines the contributions of Jewish and Christian women who worked prior to the twentieth century. It begins by analyzing the reception history of female biblical scholarship. Next, the essay provides a short overview of women interpreters of the Bible, beginning with late antiquity (150–500 CE) and moving to the late nineteenth century. The final section engages the contributions of women interpreters from a globalized context. It demonstrates that these writings contribute to a more robust reception history of women's interpretation of the Bible.

The History of Biblical Interpretation: Women Interpreters as Subjects of Study

Although historians of Judaism and Christianity had studied the history of biblical interpretation for many decades, it was not until the late 1990s that numerous biblical scholars began to take interest. Overlapping with the history of biblical interpretation, "reception history" (history of how the Bible has been received and used in culture) includes attention to both scholarly and popular interpretations, mostly the history of writings authored by men. Preachers are also interested in the history of biblical reception. The InterVarsity Press Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (ACCS), a popular series launched in 1998, responds to and contributes to this interest. ACCS volumes present collections of short excerpts from the church fathers commenting on biblical passages, with intentional inclusion of several early Christian women.[1] Likewise, Wiley's Blackwell Bible Commentaries, with titles like David Gunn's *Judges through the Centuries* (2005), discusses women's and men's scholarly and popular treatments of biblical texts.[2] Even the Bible in Medieval Tradition (BMT) series, started by William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company in 2011, and InterVarsity Press's Reformation Commentary on Scripture (RCS), launched in 2012, include excerpts from male and female leaders, preachers, and scholars.[3] Yet in these anthologies of historical Christian and Jewish writings, women's voices remain often severely underrepresented. For instance, Donald McKim's *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters*, published in 2007, contains entries treating over two hundred men but only three women (Julian of Norwich [1342–ca. 1416], Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, and Phyllis Trible).[4] In this sense, the perspective of these historical women has been lost, ignored, or even rejected by mainstream scholarship though the early twenty-first century.

While mainstream anthologies mostly ignore female interpretations of biblical literature, sustained and focused scholarly work that retrieves and analyzes women's interpretation began in earnest in the early 2000s.[5] Four Canadian scholars, Marion Ann Taylor, Christiana de Groot, Heather Weir, and Nancy Calvert-Koyzis, were at the forefront of the efforts to establish the history of women's interpretation as a recognized area within biblical studies. They organized sessions at the annual meetings of the Canadian Society of Biblical Studies (CSBS) and the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL). They also published groundbreaking anthologies. Since 2003, the CSBS has included

sessions on historical women interpreters. The SBL began a program unit on "Recovering Female Interpreters of the Bible" in 2006 that encourages the scholarly retrieval of historical women's overlooked writings. Many of the papers presented at these sessions were later published in anthologies of essays devoted to the topic.[6]

The first major collection of historical sources that portrays women's biblical interpretation is *Let Her Speak for Herself: Nineteenth-Century Women Writing on Women in Genesis* (2006).[7] This anthology, compiled by Taylor and Weir, explores numerous nineteenth-century writings by Jewish and Christian authors in British, Euro-American, and on occasion African-American social contexts. This collection provides a window into nineteenth-century women's interpretive methods and their diverse views on gender. *Let Her Speak for Herself* treats women's writings on Eve, Hagar, Sarah, and other women in the book of Genesis. Two similar anthologies, containing excerpts from nineteenth-century women writers commenting on female characters in Joshua-Judges and in the gospels, were published in 2016.[8]

In this first anthology, Weir and Taylor set out to rediscover women's writings on biblical texts. They scoured library catalogs, databases, and used booksellers' inventory lists to compile their collection of works. Weir and Taylor used techniques including database searches for "Bible" as the "subject" in library catalogs while simultaneously entering Victorian-era women's first names (or "Mrs.") as search terms for "author." Through this effort, Taylor and Weir discovered titles by more than one-thousand women writing about the Bible in the nineteenth century.[9] Their collection displays numerous works by women on the Bible for a new generation of scholars.

Another recent publication, Katherine Clay Bassard's *Transforming Scriptures: African American Women Writers and the Bible* (2010), treats nineteenth-century African American women's intellectual engagement with scripture through novels, speeches, and poetry.[10] *The Bible and Women: An Encyclopaedia of Exegesis and Cultural History*, an international project originating with the European Society of Women in Theological Research (ESWTR), is a series of volumes on feminist exegesis, reception history of biblical passages about women, and the contributions of women as biblical interpreters through the centuries.[11] To date, the most thorough treatment of the topic is Marion Taylor and Agnes Choi's *Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters*, a biographical encyclopedia with entries on 180 women who interpreted the Bible between the fourth and twentieth centuries of the Common

Era.[12]

By the second decade of the twenty-first century, scholars working on reception history began to pay greater attention to women. In his 2011-study on the Bible in Victorian culture, Timothy Larsen examines male and female interpreters, in roughly equal numbers.[13] Joy Schroeder's 2014 survey of two thousand years of Jewish and Christian reception of the story of Deborah places male and female interpretations side by side, identifying over 150 women who commented on Judges 4–5. Finally, Emerson Powery and Rodney Sadler's study of biblical interpretation in antebellum slave narratives includes significant treatment of Harriet Jacobs (1813–97).[14]

Women Interpreters through the Centuries

Many reception historians have noted that the history of women's interpretation presents the surprising array of female biblical interpreters and their exegetical contributions. Despite being deprived of access to formal education in universities, academies, and rabbinic schools, many women prior to the twentieth century achieved high degrees of literacy and fluency in biblical languages, sometimes through private tutoring in elite homes, convents, or the households of learned rabbis. Others studied the Bible in vernacular translations, using commentaries as guides. Many wrote devotional works for popular audiences and produced books to educate children. Modern scholars have sometimes dismissed such "popular" works, but Marion Taylor notes that "it is often 'popular' interpreters who have had more impact on a generation than academic and scholarly interpreters."[15] Novelist and social activist, Harriet Beecher Stowe's (1811–96), published *Woman in Sacred History* which was reprinted multiple times, often as an embossed gift edition marketed for girls and women.[16] This section offers a brief reception history of these contributions, mentioning important female figures from late antiquity through the nineteenth-century.

Female Biblical Interpreters in Late Antiquity (150 CE to 500 CE)

Only four women interpreters in late antiquity—all Christian—left substantial amounts of extant writing. North African matron, Vibia Perpetua (d. 203), who was imprisoned and martyred in Carthage, composed a Latin diary of her experiences and dreams. She interpreted her experiences of persecution and impending martyrdom through the lens of the image of the woman crushing the head of the serpent (Gen 3:16). For Perpetua, this image represented her victory over the devil.[17] In the early 380s, Egeria, a devout woman from Gaul or northern Spain, traveled on pilgrimage to Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and Mesopotamia, visiting sites revered as the locations of noteworthy biblical events. Egeria studied the Bible and reference works. She also eagerly questioned learned monks and bishops about biblical history. The extant portion of her Latin travel diary is particularly attentive to the events of Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, and the gospels.[18]

Faltonia Betitia Proba (ca. 320–ca. 370) used lines from Virgil's poetry to retell biblical stories.[19] Proba followed established tradition by assigning blame to Eve in her interpretation of Genesis 2–3. But her retelling also omits reference to woman's subjection. Byzantine empress, Eudocia (ca. 400–460), wrote a Greek epic poem using lines from Homer to relate creation, the fall, and salvation history.[20] Eudocia also composed metrical Greek paraphrases of Genesis through Ruth and the books of Daniel and Zechariah. Unfortunately, these works do not exist anymore.

Other Christian women's writings are lost, perhaps even intentionally suppressed by the church. For instance, the compositions authored by Priscilla, Maximilla, and Quintilla (second century CE) were destroyed. As leaders of the New Prophecy (Montanist) sect, these women taught that the Holy Spirit remained active and granted visions and prophecies to women and men alike. Their theological opponents preserved fragments of these three women's teachings in their rebukes against them. Intriguingly, the prophet Quintilla alluded to imagery of Lady Wisdom (Proverbs 8–9), reporting that Jesus came to her in female form, imparting wisdom to her.[21] A fourth-century opponent of the movement stated that New Prophecy adherents attributed a special, positive status to Eve for eating of the tree of knowledge.[22]

Other contributions from women were preserved and admired by male writers. For example, Jerome (347–420) hints about contributions of scholarly Roman women Paula (347–404) and Marcella (ca. 327–410), even praising Paula's expertise in Hebrew.[23] An elite monastic woman, Melania the Younger (ca. 383–439), made extensive handwritten notes on her study of scripture and

patristic commentaries. Her notebooks are now lost.[24] For the most part, early Christian leaders discouraged women from writing works that would circulate publicly. The ideal woman was a quiet, grateful, financially generous recipient and reader of men's writings rather than a producer of literature.

Scripture references, found in fourth-century Greek papyri letters and other documents, are clearly dictated or penned by Egyptian Christian women.[25] Women's monument inscriptions provide glimpses into their perspectives on scripture, including the significance of the New Testament deacon Phoebe.[26] Roman women commissioned burial chamber frescoes that used biblical themes such as Noah's ark, Moses parting the Red Sea, and Daniel in the lions' den to express their hope in the resurrection.[27]

Only traces remain of ancient Jewish women's biblical interpretation. Philo of Alexandria (first century CE), offers an idealized account of a community of male and female ascetics who studied scripture allegorically.[28] These "Therapeutae" are perhaps ahistorical, but they indicate that women scholars of the Bible were not out of the realm of possibility. Similarly, the Talmud preserves a saying from the sage, Beruriah (second century CE): "A claustra [door latch], Rabbi Tarfon declares unclean and the sages declare clean. And Beruriah says: One lets it fall from the doorway and hangs it on the next (doorway) on the Sabbath. These things were said before Rabbi Joshua. He said: Beruriah has spoken well."[29] Judith Hauptman argues that this passage provides evidence that numerous women learned Torah through instruction in rabbinic households.[30] Finally, Greek, Latin, and Arabic sources preserved fragments of ancient writings from philosopher and chemist, Maria of Alexandria, whose work contains biblical allusions.[31]

Women Reading the Bible in the Middle Ages (600 CE to 1500CE)

Medieval nuns and other devout Christian women produced a significant corpus of visionary literature—texts written or dictated by women reporting divine revelations that frequently interpreted biblical texts. German nun, Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), reported an experience of divine illumination in which "immediately I knew the meaning of the exposition of the Scriptures, namely the Psalter, the Gospel, and the other catholic volumes of both the Old and the New

Testaments."[32] She attributed her knowledge to heavenly inspiration, but modern experts also credit Hildegard's genius and evidence of extensive study. Hosts of other nuns, members of religious orders, anchoresses (enclosed solitaries), and beguines (devout celibate women living in small communities) left Latin and vernacular writings that interpreted scripture: Héloïse (ca. 1090–1164), Elisabeth of Schönau (1129–65), Clare of Assisi (1193/94–1253), Angela of Foligno (ca. 1248–1309), Hadewijch of Antwerp (thirteenth century), Mechthild of Magdeburg (1210–82), Gertrude the Great of Helfta (ca. 1256–1302), Birgitta of Sweden (ca. 1302–72), Julian of Norwich, Catherine of Siena (1347–80), and numerous others. Inventories of medieval convent libraries provide evidence of religious women's study of the Bible.[33]

The court writer Christine de Pizan (ca. 1364–ca. 1430), dismayed by misogynistic tracts in circulation, penned *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405). She uses the stories of Deborah, Judith, and the Queen of Sheba as proof of women's intellectual and moral equality with men. Her 1409 commentary on the penitential psalms, *Le sept psaumes allégorisés*, includes quotations from patristic and medieval theologians.[34] Noblewoman Lucrezia Tornabuoni de' Medici (ca. 1427–82) composed versified retellings of stories about Susanna, Tobias, Judith, Esther, and John the Baptist.[35] Several essays on significant women interpreters, including Jewish women in the Spanish kingdom, are included in a volume on the High Middle Ages in *The Bible and Women* series.[36]

Women Biblical Interpreters in the Early Modern Era (1500CE to 1780CE)

Sixteenth-century Protestant and Catholic women actively participated in Reformation debates. In 1523, Argula von Grumbach, a Bavarian Lutheran noblewoman, published a polemical pamphlet that included more than eighty scriptural citations. When she responded to critics who told her to be silent and tend to her needlework, she countered that her words were no mere "woman's chit-chat but the word of God."[37] Von Grumbach was joined by dozens of other sixteenth-century women—Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish—whose words went into print. Deborah Ascarelli, a Jewish woman living in Rome in the 1530s, translated Hebrew liturgical material into Italian and composed poetry about the biblical Susannah.[38] Protestant writers included Marie Dentière (1495–1561),

Marguerite of Navarre (1492–1549), Katharina Schütz Zell (ca. 1498–1562), and Katherine Parr (1512–48). Teresa of Ávila (1515–82), a Catholic nun, authored an exegetical meditation on the Song of Songs.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a virtual explosion of female-authored publications used biblical arguments to refute misogynistic pamphlets disparaging women. In 1617, a woman writing under the pseudonym Ester Sowernam published *Ester hath hang'd Haman*, a rebuttal to Joseph Swetnam's 1615 *Araignment of lewd, idle, froward, and unconstant women.* Sowernam praised the heroism of the Egyptian midwives, Pharaoh's daughter, Rahab, Abigail, Judith, Susannah, and Esther, whose name the author adopted.[39] English poet, Aemilia Lanyer (1569–1648), composed a versified defense of Eve, written in the voice of Pilate's wife (Matt. 27:19).[40] Lucrezia Marinella (1571–1653), Rachel Speght (ca. 1597–1661), and Arcangela Tarabotti (1604–52) likewise defended women by employing biblical arguments. Tarabotti, a Venetian nun, is the earliest known female author to interpret the story of Jephthah's daughter (Judg. 11), whose sacrifice and suffering she compared to her own experience of cruelty at the hands of her father who forced her into the convent.[41]

Most early modern women read the Bible in the vernacular. But some attained an impressive command of biblical languages. Olympia Morata (ca. 1526–55) translated psalms into classical Greek meters.[42] Bathsua Makin (ca. 1600–after 1675) was proficient in Greek, Hebrew, and Syriac. After teaching young men at a London academy, she opened a school for young gentlewomen, arguing that her curriculum for girls revived an ancient tradition of female education evidenced by the queen of Sheba, the "great poet and philosopher" Miriam, and the prophet Huldah who belonged to a college "where women were trained up in good literature." Makin recommended that women learn Greek and Hebrew.[43] Anna Maria van Schurman (1607–78) studied Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, Syriac, and Aramaic. She authored an *Amplification of the First Three Chapters of Genesis.*[44]

Natasha Duquette's book *Veiled Intents* (2016) studied the strategies of eighteenth-century women who "intentionally placed their biblical hermeneutics and theological aesthetics within mediums [e.g., poetry] most palatable to an audience resistant to the idea of a public woman theologian."[45]

Although historians and scholars of language and literature studied numerous works by early modern women, research on women's biblical interpretation is still in its beginning stages. Resources include the translation series, *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe*, launched by the University of Chicago Press in

1996 and continued by the University of Toronto Press since 2009. Sources for researching biblical interpretation by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Japanese Christian women, who drew upon Buddhist and Christian monastic traditions to express religious devotion, include missionary records "which preserve fragments of these women's written and spoken words."[46]

Women Interpreters in the "Long Nineteenth Century" (1780–1918)

Hundreds of nineteenth-century women published works that interpreted the Bible, especially in the genre of scripture biography, collections of biographical sketches of biblical women. These literary portraits included imaginative retellings of the women's stories and devotional applications to the readers' lives. Mary Elizabeth Beck's *Bible Readings on Bible Women* (1892) drew a temperance lesson from the story of Samson's unnamed mother who abstained from alcohol while pregnant so her unborn son could observe his Nazarite vow *in utero.* To discourage pregnant women from consuming beer "to keep up their strength," Beck's lesson included a recipe for a nutritious milky oatmeal porridge.[47] Women struggled with ethical issues raised by the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter and Jael's assassination of the unwitting Sisera. Most scripture biographies were written by English-speaking Christian women who had not studied biblical languages. Still some did substantial research using commentaries and academic works on biblical history. Anglo-Jewish author, Grace Aguilar (1816–47), wrote *The Women of Israel*, which was exceedingly popular in Jewish and Christian homes.[48]

During America's Second Great Awakening (1790–1844) and its immediate aftermath, numerous Baptist, Methodist, and African Methodist Episcopal women undertook preaching tours and published autobiographies filled with exegesis, including scriptural support for women's preaching.[49] African-American preachers included Zilpha Elaw (b. 1790), Jarena Lee (1782–ca. 1864), Julia Foote (1823–1900), and the Shaker eldress, Rebecca Cox Jackson (1795–1871). Arguing for spiritual equality between men and women, Jackson said God made Eve "'Lordess' over all creation, sharing dominion with Adam." In Genesis 2, God breathed into the two nostrils of Adam in order to impart *two* spirits into him—Adam's spirit and the spirit of Eve who would soon be drawn out of his side.[50]

Elements of proto-womanist biblical interpretation appeared in publications of African-American social activists. Sojourner Truth (ca. 1791–1883), who lived more than thirty-five years as a slave, claimed authority to interpret the text for herself rather than accepting interpretations imposed by others. Unable to read, she listened to the Bible read aloud. Frustrated by adults who explained the text to her, she preferred the assistance of children who simply read and re-read the text as requested. Through this method, Truth could discern the meaning of the narrative using her own reasoning.[51] Maria Stewart (1803–79), who lectured in Boston, adopted a prophetic persona to announce judgment upon American's racism. Like many of her contemporaries, she quoted Ps. 68:31 (KJV), "Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God," to assert that God's blessings rested upon people of African descent.[52] Eloise Alberta Bibb (1878–1927), an African-American poet, published a poem expressing the grief and pathos of Hagar as she begged Abraham not to expel her and Ishmael from his household into the wilderness.[53]

African-American, Euro-American, and European women often engaged the Bible in their activism. They sometimes reinterpreted texts to call for a more liberating application of scripture to contemporary social practices. Others, like Icelandic suffragist, Briet Bjarnhedinsdottir (1856–1940), criticized the misogyny they observed in biblical texts.[54] Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902) edited *The Woman's Bible*, a controversial commentary published in two parts in 1895 and 1898. Cady Stanton (who read Greek but not Hebrew) recruited women to work with her on the project. Priscilla Pope-Levison notes: "Her guiding hermeneutical assumption, greatly influenced by the claims of historical criticism, was that biblical texts were written and edited by men, not by God; therefore these texts are open to interpretation, criticism, and even rejection."[55] Parts of *The Woman's Bible* disparaged Judaism. Contributor, Ellen Battelle Dietrick (1847–95), said that Genesis 2 had originally been egalitarian but the passage had been "manipulated by some Jew."[56] Another contributor, Freethought activist Clara Neyman (fl. 1890s), argued the opposite, using the example of Deborah to demonstrate that women held positions of authority in "ancient Judaism," and that it was Christianity that often "circumscribed woman's sphere of action, and has been guilty of great injustice toward the whole sex."[57]

Most nineteenth- and early twentieth-century women interpreters did not have opportunities to study biblical languages. Exceptions included Emilie Grace Briggs (1867–1944), daughter of Charles Augustus Briggs, co-editor of the magisterial *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon.* She earned

the bachelor of divinity degree from Union Theological Seminary in 1897. Briggs undertook Ph.D. studies at Union, completing her thesis in 1913 and fulfilling all requirements except publication of her thesis. Not credited for her contributions to the *Brown-Driver-Briggs Lexicon*, Briggs was nevertheless responsible for a number of the entries submitted by her father.[58] In 1914, German theologian, Hedwig Jahnow (1879–1944), published "Die Frau im Alten Testament" ("Woman in the Old Testament"), which analyzed the role of women in public and private life in the biblical world.[59] Scottish twins, Agnes Smith Lewis (1843–1926) and Margaret Dunlop Gibson (1843–1920), discovered a Syriac manuscript of the Gospel of Matthew in a palimpsest at St. Catherine's monastery in Egypt and a Hebrew fragment of Sirach at a Cairo synagogue.[60]

Even while using biblical texts to counter misogyny, many women through the centuries embraced patriarchal values emphasizing women's domesticity. European and Euro-American women, including those expressing protofeminist or early feminist ideas, often voiced views that were racist, anti-Jewish, anti-Muslim, supersessionist, or colonialist. In response, African-American women, such as Maria Stewart and Zilpha Elaw, used biblical arguments to criticize the racism they observed in the words, actions, and silence of white American women. Grace Aguilar protested the anti-Judaism she encountered in Christian women's writings, noting shrewdly that the example of Deborah offered "rather an *unsatisfactory* proof of the degradation of Jewish women."[61]

Globalization in the Study of Women Interpreters

Jewish, Orthodox Christian, Eastern European, Asian, African, African-American, and Latin American women are often underrepresented as subjects in the current scholarship of women interpreters of the Bible. The following examples, from diverse religious traditions and five continents, illustrates how future studies might include a more global and inclusive account of these contributions.

Jewish Women Interpreters in Eastern Europe

Literacy rates for Jewish women in the early modern period were much higher than for Christians. Jewish girls often learned to read vernacular Yiddish, printed in Hebrew characters. Yiddish translations of the Pentateuch and Psalms were published specifically for women, with women often directly involved in the printing process.[62] Royzl Fishl owned a publishing house and printed a Yiddish translation of the Psalms in Krakow in 1586. Fishl herself located Rabbi Moshe Shtendl's translation in Hanover, faithfully copying it in preparation for printing.[63] Learned women served in the role of *firzogerin* (prayer leader) in the women's section of the synagogue. In this position, women led in the recitation of the *tkhines* (prayers) and liturgy.[64] Scholars have identified six early modern Jewish women who authored prayers and devotional rhymes. In 1686 Sheyndele, wife of Gershon ben Shmuel from Galicia (present-day Ukraine), published a song elaborating on the account of Moses receiving the Ten Commandments.[65] Other female authors of *tkhines* include Rokhl bas Mordkhe Soyfer (*fl*. 1700) in Fintshuv (Poland) and Toybe Pan (*fl*. 1680) in Prague.

Rivkah bat Meir Tiktiner of Prague (d. 1605), daughter of a Polish scholar, used her knowledge of Hebrew to write a Yiddish-language conduct manual that interpreted biblical and rabbinic texts for women. Her work applied these passages to numerous themes including marriage, pregnancy, child-rearing, religious observance, synagogue attendance, and household administration.[66] Entitled *Meneket Rivkah* ("Rebekah's nurse," an allusion to Gen. 35:8), it was published posthumously in Prague in 1609. Drawing on Prov. 14:1, "The wisdom of women builds her house," and on rabbinic interpretations of Gen. 2:22, which applied the idea of God fashioning or "building" a woman from Adam's rib to women's reproductive role of serving as a "house" to the male semen in pregnancy, Rivkah bat Meir extended the rabbinic imagery of "building" to women teaching and raising their children. Thus she added "an active, socially cultivating function to the woman's purely biological function."[67] God's statement to Eve, "I will increase your pangs" (Gen. 3:16), referred not only to labor pains but also to the hard work of raising children.[68]

Rivkah bat Meir's treatment of God's command to Abraham to obey Sarah (Gen. 21:12) included a discussion of the wife's duty to instruct her husband—and his responsibility to obey her—if she observed him doing something in need of correction. Though Rivkah bat Meir generally commended traditional social roles, Abraham and Sarah's story nevertheless illustrated that ideal marriages entail mutual spousal obedience.[69] Rivkah bat Meir warrants further study by feminist biblical scholars and historians of reception history, particularly

scholars with expertise in sixteenth-century Yiddish.

Wallata Petros, Ethiopian Archdeaconess

The Life and Struggles of Our Mother Walatta Petros is a seventeenth-century Ethiopic text recounting the story of an archdeaconess nun, Wallata Petros (1592–1642), who successfully led her Ethiopian Orthodox community to repel European Jesuit efforts to convert them to Roman Catholicism. The male author, Galawdewos, penned the biography three decades after Petros's death. He reported that he was prompted by Qiddista Kristos, a nun who knew her, to write down stories related by eyewitnesses.[70] Foremost among the informants were nuns from Wallata Petros's monastery. The abbess specifically authorized Galawdewos to write. Wendy Laura Belcher characterized the text as "the oldest book-length biography written by Africans about an African woman" and "a community oral history."[71] The text, written three decades after the saint's death, cannot give direct access to Walatta Petros's interpretive thought. Yet, it was communally produced with significant input from women. Scholars seeking to study women's interpretation can view the biography as a collaborative project—several men and many women using biblical themes to reflect on the life of someone they admired. The biography is interspersed with quotations from the Geez (Ethiopic) translation of the Greek New Testament and the Septuagint.

The book *The Life and Struggles of Our Mother Wallata Petros* reports that its namesake—Wallata Petros—was a well-versed scholar of the Bible. It states that she studied the Gospel of John daily and was knowledgeable about the Psalms.[72] *The Life and Struggles of Our Mother Wallata Petros* offers numerous comparisons between the nomadic patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and Petros, since she regularly uprooted and relocated her monastic community.[73] Witnesses recounted that, when surrounded by a dangerous grassfire, she fittingly uttered the prayer voiced by the three men in the fiery furnace (Dan. 3:66).[74] The text poignantly reported that Petros looked to scripture for comfort while she was placed at risk of marital rape when forced from monastery to return to her husband. Stories of God's protection of Sarah and Susannah gave her hope during this grim period of her life.[75] On her deathbed, Petros commissioned Eheta Kristos to succeed her in leadership of the monastic community. The text compares this transition to that of Moses and Joshua, as well as Elijah and Elisha.[76] The book on her life is a unique resource for

individuals seeking a window into the experiences of Ethiopian women in this era. Experts on the Geez biblical text, particularly scholars interested in women's interpretation, could shed further light on the contributions of the Ethiopian women who collaborated with the scribe who penned the account.

Ursula de Jesús, Afro-Peruvian Mystic

Ursula de Jesús (1604–66), born in Lima to African-descent slaves, was sent at the age of 13 to serve as slave to a teen-aged nun at the Convent of Santa Clara. Rules regulating nuns' ownership of private property required slaves to perform brutally exhausting labor for the entire convent in addition to housekeeping duties for their owners. After decades of servitude, Ursula was purchased into freedom by another nun in 1645. With limited options in colonial Peru, Ursula remained in the convent as a *donada*, a religious servant under vows. From 1650 to 1661, she kept a diary of her visions, dictated in Spanish to other nuns. Parts of the document may have been written by her own hand.[77] Ursula's visionary experiences, which included visits from saints, angels, and the souls in purgatory, criticized the racism of nuns and clergymen.

Ursula's scriptural knowledge likely came from liturgical participation and religious instruction. She reflected on New Testament events, such as Jesus' curse of the fig tree (Mark 11:12–25), the Last Supper, and the crucifixion. In a unique reframing of the story of three male disciples reproached for slumbering in the garden of Gethsemane (Mark 13:32–36), a celestial voice was gentle with Ursula, exhausted with overwork, for falling asleep while praying on Maundy Thursday night.[78] She interpreted Gen. 2:7–8 in light of Jesus' dying words on the cross (Luke 23:46): "It took great effort to make the clay and shape it, and we owe Him more than the angels do. After he formed us He gave us souls with just one breath from his mouth. Had I not heard that when people die, they say, 'Into your hands, oh Lord, I commend my spirit'?"[79] Historical documents, including letters, wills, court records, and slave narratives, provide glimpses into the religious lives of other Afro-Latina women.[80]

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Mexican Nun

Sor (Sister) Juana Inés de la Cruz (1651–95), a nun at the convent of Santa Paula in Mexico City, wrote drama and poetry with mythological and biblical themes. Her play, *Joseph's Scepter*, was a dramatic interpretation of Genesis 37–50. She read the Bible in Latin and used Old Testament and New Testament references to write her *Athenagoric Letter*, which critiqued the sermon of a Portuguese Jesuit. This reading made her the target of a literary attack by Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz, bishop of Puebla, who published her *Letter* (without her permission) together with a preface that the bishop wrote under the name of a fictitious nun "Sor Philothea" ("God-lover"). Though the *Letter* was a religious work of biblical interpretation, "Sor Philotea" urged Sor Juana to improve her choice of books by "sometimes reading" scripture.[81]

Responding to the public rebuke, Sor Juana authored her *Reply to Sor Philothea*, an autobiographical defense of women's learning, a text that demonstrated her virtuoso knowledge of scripture. The *Reply* asserted the usefulness of the liberal arts and sciences for studying the Bible: "How, lacking logic, was I to understand the general and specific methodologies of which Holy Scripture is composed? How, without rhetoric, could I understand its figures, tropes, and locutions?"[82] She asserted the benefits of applying geometry to the measurement of the ark of the covenant; arithmetic to the "mysterious computations of years, days, months, hours, weeks" in Daniel; the study of music to explain the power of David's harp (1 Sam. 16:23); architecture to comprehend the building of Solomon's temple; and astronomy to explicate Job's reference to Arcturus and the stars of the Pleiades (Job 38:31–32).[83] She invoked Deborah and the queen of Sheba as precedent for women's education.

Pandita Ramabai, Indian Translator

Pandita Ramabai (1858–1922), born in southwestern India, was raised in the Hindu faith by a scholarly Brahmin family. She studied and memorized Sanskrit texts. Orphaned in a famine, Ramabai traveled to Calcutta, where Hindu holy men acclaimed her for her learning. Educated in the English language by Anglican nuns, she converted to Christianity, which she believed was more conducive to women's equality. Ramabai studied Greek and Hebrew in England. Returning to India, she founded institutions to shelter and educate vulnerable women and girls. Her Mukti Mission ("Salvation Mission") was the site of a Pentecostal revival.[84] Religious and scholarly impulses intersected in her

translation work. Ramabai criticized the Bible Society's Marathi translation for its use of Sanskrit terminology, which she said reflected Hindu worldviews and was linguistically inaccessible to common village-dwellers, especially women. Assisted by other scholars, she completed her own translation of the Bible into the Marathi language used by the people of her region. Young women at the Mukti Mission operated the printing presses that published the translation in 1924, shortly after Ramabai's death.[85] Ramabai also published a Marathi-language Hebrew grammar.[86] She intended to produce a Bible commentary and other study aids, which remained unfinished.

Ramabai's translation differed from the Bible Society's version by referring to God as Yehovah rather than *parameshwar* (Sankrit for "god"). She believed that the Bible Society's translation of Gen. 1:1 evoked the sense of God "begetting" rather than creating, phraseology reminiscent of the Supreme Being *Brahman* uniting with "*Maya*, a coeternal female deity," to produce "a golden egg, of the same substance as *Brahman*," from which hatched all of creation. Use of such terminology, Ramabai claimed, reflected an idolatrous worldview since creation itself could be worshipped if it shared the substance of *Brahman*.[87] Though there have been scholarly assessments of the literary quality and success of Ramabai's translation project, there is need for in-depth study of Ramabai as a biblical interpreter.

Conclusion

The retrieval of the history of women's biblical interpretation is an exciting new area in feminist studies. Although this research is in its early stages, scholars have already unearthed hundreds of inspiring and sometimes disturbing examples of women's Bible interpretations. The majority of this work has focused on English-language writings of nineteenth-century British and American Protestant women of privilege. Additional analysis is required for women of color, Jewish women, women interpreters who worked prior to the nineteenth century, and women interpreters living outside Europe and the United States. The examples above and the brief histories of women from five continents illustrate the rich possibilities for scholarship on global voices. Investigations of women's readings in music, textiles, painting, sculpture, and artistic patronage are also needed. There exist important but still untapped resources, and there are imaginative possibilities for scholars who seek to recover women's forgotten exegetical voices—or at least listen for their echoes

—while acknowledging the limits of the historical sources that preserve them to this day.

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[11] There are essays on female readers and interpreters in Kari Elisabeth Børresen and Adriana Valeria, eds., *The High Middle Ages: The Bible and Women: An Encyclopedia of Exegesis and Cultural History* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2015). Several forthcoming volumes will similarly include the role of historical women as interpreters of biblical texts.

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CHAPTER 29

A QUEER CRITIQUE OF LOOKING FOR "MALE" AND "FEMALE" VOICES IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

CARYN TAMBER-ROSENAU

CAN modern researchers recover female voices in the Hebrew Bible, hidden in plain sight among the male-authored bulk of the corpus? The possibility is tantalizing. If we can identify parts of the Bible that bear the marks of women's interests and concerns, feminist readers gain new ways to relate to and interpret scripture. Additionally, if these scholars find authentic female voices in the Bible, we get closer to finding out what women's lives in ancient Israel were really like. In the landmark work *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible* (1993), Athalya Brenner and the late Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes propose that this type of recovery is possible.[1] Their book was, and still is, hugely influential in feminist biblical scholarship and precedes a plethora of interpretations that seek to recover authentic female voices in biblical texts.

Much as scholars trying to gender texts might wish to avoid gender stereotypes, the method promoted by Brenner and Dijk-Hemmes virtually guarantees reifying them. Since those doing this work do not generally engage with gender performance theory, a branch of queer theory that questions the inherence of gender, they reproduce the normative understanding of gender difference as it applies to "masculinity" and "femininity." Ironically, the boom in scholarship that searches for "M" or "F" voices in biblical texts coincides with the growth of queer-theoretical and gender-critical approaches to the Bible.

However, I know of no queer-influenced critique of the practice of gendering texts. Queer and gender-based approaches question ideas of "man" and "woman," "masculine" and "feminine," "homosexual" and "heterosexual." They aim to expose the complex ideologies that go into constructing and reinforcing these categories. Gender performance methods examine how perceived ideas of masculinity and femininity, male and female, heterosexual and homosexual are produced and shaped by many interlocking factors.

This paper will argue that the M/F textual schema both implies and reinforces a fixed gender binary, a notion that queer theory in general and queer biblical criticism in particular have challenged persuasively. Brenner's and Dijk-Hemmes's method also ignores the role of performance in the construction of gender. Thus, while their attempt to recover female voices in the Hebrew Bible is noble in motivations, the idea that the recovery of women's voices can be done by looking to a text's "gendered" language or interests is unhelpful to feminist biblical studies. It would be more productive for scholars seeking gender equality to look to queer and gender critical methods to analyze the manufactured and contested natures of masculinity and femininity in the biblical texts.

The following steps structure the analysis performed in this article. First, the chapter discusses the methodology proposed by Brenner and Dijk-Hemmes in *On Gendering Texts*. Second, it addresses other scholars' use of these methods, as well as Brenner's self-critique in a later essay. Third, the essay examines the insights into sex and gender that queer theory and queer biblical criticism bring to the table. It explores how the theories of queer-theoretical and gender-critical approaches contribute to the gendering of biblical narratives. Finally, the essay offers a queer theory-influenced deconstruction for the study of female and male voices in the Bible, including a queer critique of the work that used Brenner's and Dijk-Hemmes's methodology.

The Power and Promise of Brenner's and Dijk-Hemmes's Proposal

On Gendering Texts was the result of a collaboration between Brenner and Dijk-Hemmes when they realized that both of them were working on similar projects.[2] These two scholars independently built on the work of S. D. Goitein who, grounded in his research on poetry of Yemenite émigrés to Israel in 1949

and 1950, identifies textual features common in women's writings and literary compositions. He later transfers his discoveries to the Bible where he names various biblical literary genres as women's creations, such as victory songs, mockery songs, women's rebukes, love poems, whispered prayers, dirges and other laments, as well as the speeches of the wise woman, the soothsayer, the prophetess, and the dancing women. Goitein explains:

> It is natural for woman, whose emotional life is strong and delicate, to be sensitive to religious poetry and endowed with the gift of song. In a society which does not oppress woman, especially one which does not humiliate her spirit or steal her self-worth from her, these traits find their outlet in creativity. Biblical society was such, and we have therefore found that the Hebrew woman of ancient days lifted up her voice in song.[3]

Brenner and Dijk-Hemmes both cite Gotein, but then expand upon his premise. The authors, operating with a feminist sensibility, set out not to essentialize gender (as Goitein had). Their work, unlike Goitein's, makes no claims that ancient Israel represented a creative paradise for women. Instead, they dissect the patriarchal nature of the world produced by the Bible. Brenner and Dijk-Hemmes ask whether it is possible to establish if a narrative is the product of male or female culture, and, if so, whether such a determination matters. They answer in the affirmative on both counts.[4] Rather than look for the authorship of biblical material, both scholars aim to uncover the putative oral prehistory of the texts. They concentrate on the slippery notion of "voice." Brenner states, "When all or most of the affirmative answers to the questions, Who speaks? Who focalizes the action? Whose viewpoint is dominant?—converge on one and the same textual figure, then that figure embodies the dominant voice of a passage, be it prose narrative or poetic."[5] The project was of great importance, as Brenner explains in the following statement:

> In our view, gendering texts is an invaluable step toward a reconstruction of ancient Israel's culture. Israelite culture, as it is reflected in the Hebrew Bible, is distorted by gender bias and M literary supremacy . . . . By redefining biblical women's (and men's) voices we redefine not only individual texts, not only "women's culture." By so doing we redefine a human culture as a whole, for human societies are bi-gendered.[6]

Dijk-Hemmes also maintains that the project does not need to essentialize gender because the differences in men's and women's textual voices are not attributable to biology. Rather, they are the result of social construction. She affirms that social roles generate gendered interests. As a result, this construction produces a distinct women's culture and authentic women's voices.[7] In other words, Brenner and Dijk-Hemmes assume that biblical literature is not an

accurate depiction of gendered life in ancient Israel, but heavily biased by its androcentric representation. They also presuppose a gender binary in their effort to trace "women's" culture in the Hebrew Bible.

In her chapters, Dijk-Hemmes combs the entire corpus for female voices, especially texts that the Bible itself attributes to women. She begins by asking whether a text depicts "reality from a female perspective." Markers of F voice, according to Dijk-Hemmes, include accounts of female experiences and subversions of stereotyped ideas about women.[8] She cautions that biblical texts may contain a "double voice," a muted women's story detectable alongside or interwoven with a dominant androcentric one. This double voice occurs because biblical women live in a male-dominated culture and their voice is subsumed under androcentric authorship. Women, Dijk-Hemmes suggests, include both authentic experiences and the expectations forced upon them by patriarchal society in their texts.[9] For Dijk-Hemmes, examples of F voices in the Bible include the end of the Song of Deborah (Judg. 5:24–27, 28–30), the women exulting Saul and David's battle kills (1 Sam. 18:7), and the words of wise women (2 Sam. 14, 20). She also considers the Song of Songs to be replete with double voice, reflecting a woman's desires yet bound by a patriarchal world of abusive brothers and watchmen.[10] Dijk-Hemmes sees social criticism embedded in many of these texts. In her view, women would have been more likely to compose these kinds of texts because of their place on the margins of society.

On Gendering Texts, on the Scholar's Bookshelf

Many other scholars have taken up the methodology and goals developed by Brenner and Dijk-Hemmes. For example, Alice Ogden Bellis argues for an authentic female voice in Proverbs 7. She maintains that this woman, cautioning against the temptations of the strange woman, represents an F voice since womanizing men are against the interests of women and the larger community. Brenner and Dijk-Hemmes themselves suggest that this teacher of wisdom could be an F voice. But in their work, they propose that this hypothetical female author had internalized patriarchal strictures. Bellis rejects this argument because it presupposes a modern context in which sexual freedom of women is desirable. Instead, she claims that in an ancient context, this freedom would have been summarily rejected.[11]

Another example, from Richard Bauckham, argues that the book of Ruth represents a case where "a male author has adopted a female voice."[12] Interacting with Brenner and Dijk-Hemmes, Bauckham writes, "What recent feminist discussions of Ruth seem to me to have shown is that the voice with which the text speaks to its readers is female. Readers are offered and drawn into an ancient Israelite woman's perspective on ancient Israelite society."[13] Bauckham argues that the last few lines of Ruth, which give a genealogy for King David, show that the writer of Ruth is male. Still, he maintains that this narrative represents an authentic women's perspective.

Jan Willem van Henten applies Dijk-Hemmes and Brenner's methods to the Book of Judith. There, he argues for an F voice amid the dominant M voice in the text. Such a voice, he argues, presents the title character as an alternative leader to the male authorities. Henten cited as evidence the lengthy genealogy given to Judith, especially in contrast to her husband's ambiguous and lackluster pedigree; Judith's independent actions in the story; and the book's departure from the usual biblical model of men conquering the enemy and women singing about it.[14]

Another example, drawn from Mark Smith's essay on warfare songs in the Bible, engages with Brenner and Dijk-Hemmes's research that genders these compositions as female. Smith cites *On Gendering Texts* favorably: "The tradition of early heroic poetry is in no small way the domain of women, and it is arguable that a good deal of heroic poetry in early Israel is to be situated in the context of women's oral song."[15]

Similarly, Steve Cook refers to Dijk-Hemmes's theory in the analysis of biblical victory songs, specifically citing the argument that women's victory songs critique male militarism that harms women. Cook claims that this analysis should be extended to Habakkuk 3. He notes, for instance, that this biblical chapter shares many elements with other texts that Dijk-Hemmes identifies as women's victory songs: YHVH as divine warrior, warfare imagery, descriptions of water as destructive, and taunting language. Cook also points to female-gendered language in the chapter; the author refers to "my belly" (or womb) and compares his or her feet to a doe, which Cook suggests belies the existence of a feminine voice. He agrees with Dijk-Hemmes's conclusion, that victory songs often represent F voices, but he also articulates how those songs nevertheless reinscribe androcentric interests. Since the doe is a prize animal rather than a meat animal, it serves as a metaphor for the potential mistreatment of women in war. Other aspects of Habakkuk 3 persuade Cook that the chapter displays evidence of simultaneous female, male, and androgynous voices, representing

both the perpetrators and victims of war.[16]

Finally, in one of the most recent treatments of Brenner and Dijk-Hemmes's work, Nancy C. Lee uses "Hebrew feminine grammatical indicators, song of lyrical genres associated with women, and distinctive poetic patterns in the Hebrew lyrics of women's attributed (and discerned) voices in comparison to men's poetic patterns" to uncover female voices among the prophetic books.[17] For instance, in parts of First Isaiah Lee sees male and female prophets in dialog. Each uses a different pattern of syllables as well as distinct themes; the man focuses on violence and the woman on peace and children.[18]

In short, scholars have further developed Brenner and Dijk-Hemmes's proposal for recovering M and F voices in the Hebrew Bible. Some, like Bellis, deal with the original texts mentioned in *On Gendering Texts*, arguing with some of Brenner and Dijk-Hemmes's conclusions. Others cite the book's methodology, applying it with varying degrees of critical engagement to other texts. Still others, like Nancy Lee, use Brenner and Dijk-Hemmes's methods as a jumping-off point for a much more detailed schema of discerning texts' gender.

Almost ten years after the publication of *On Gendering Texts*, Brenner herself wrote an essay reflecting upon the book. On the efficacy of finding M or F voices Brenner remarks: "[I]t seems so naïve if full of worthy intentions."[19] Finding authentic female voices in the biblical text is especially challenging because women internalize the dominant male voice, Brenner notes. She writes: "I was not and am not satisfied with the positively triumphant diagnosis of either female or male voices in the text."[20] As a way forward, Brenner proposes that biblical scholars investigate what texts say about gender. Taking a page from reader-response criticism, which recognizes the paramount role of the reader's interpretive lens in making meaning, Brenner suggests reading a text *as if* it contains a female voice and seeing what possibilities that opens regarding its meaning.[21] This new approach represents a limiting of the goals and methods proposed in *On Gendering Texts*. Brenner's reflections, however, have not halted use of the book's methods by other scholars. In fact, her 2002 piece has been rarely cited, especially in comparison to *On Gendering Texts* itself.[22]

Two (and Only Two) Genders?

My methodology for this critique comes from queer-critical approaches to the Bible. Queer critics assume postmodern ideas about the fluidity of sex, gender,

and sexuality when they examine biblical texts. Thus, queer biblical criticism builds on feminist criticism even as it works in parallel to it. Queer hermeneutics start from the premise that gender systems, including the categories of "female" and "male," ought to be questioned. In addition, queer analysis problematizes ideas about sexual desire as bivalent—either heterosexual or homosexual, desiring men or desiring women. Queer theory equips biblical scholars to study how sex, gender, and sexual desire are constructed in biblical texts, and how these narratives, their relationships with other texts, and the contexts of readers undermine these constructions.

In this section, I discuss what queer theory can say about efforts to gender texts. I start by arguing that humans do not fall neatly into two and only two gender categories, marshalling evidence from biology and considering what the gender landscape might have looked like in antiquity. Next, I examine textual and iconographic clues from Israel's ancient Near Eastern neighbors to suggest that gender was not as rigid as one might imagine. Then I apply this methodology to the gender system of ancient Israel, showing that there are individuals whose biology, sexuality, or life circumstances may have restricted them from being marked as M or F. I discuss the problems of discussing gender without also discussing gender performance. Finally, I return to some of the works discussed above, using the vocabulary of queer theory to reexamine scholarship that engages with the M/F schema.

As reviewer Katharine J. Dell wrote shortly after the release of *On Gendering Texts*, "As one reads on in the book, one realizes that much weight is in fact given to cultural factors in discerning male (M) and female (F) texts—e.g. M and F 'types' in society—and to psychological evaluations of what defines male and female behaviour."[23] By trying to divine "male" and "female" voices in the Bible using the criteria suggested by Brenner and Dijk-Hemmes, readers impose modern notions of gender on the ancient world. I use the word "modern" here on purpose, in contrast to "postmodern," because queer hermeneutics, influenced by postmodernism, questions the "relentless two-sex paradigm."[24]

Brenner writes that gendering texts is important because "human societies are bi-gendered."[25] However, scholars working at the intersection of biology, sociology, history, and gender theory have shown in the last two decades that human societies are not now and probably never have been bi-gendered. The biologist and gender theorist Anne Fausto-Sterling, working on the history of classifications of sex and gender, argues that "labeling someone a man or a woman is a social decision."[26] She discusses not only the idea that gender and its existence as a duality are socially constructed, but that the two-sex system is as

well. Though in modern times, surgery on children with non-normative, "either/or, neither/nor" genitalia means that we rarely encounter such individuals as adults, she argues that variant genital and chromosomal configurations are common, perhaps representing as much as 1.7 percent of the general population, and may warrant a revision to a system of at least five genders.[27] Similarly, several cultures recognize categories for people who do not fit into one of the two standard sexes/genders.[28]

As Jonathan Stökl notes, current estimates of the prevalence of intersex people include those whose genitalia may appear normative but whose chromosomal configuration does not match those genitals. Stökl correctly points out that we cannot very well count such individuals as intersex in the ancient world, where no one could conduct DNA tests.[29] The prevalence of those of variant gender in the biblical world, then, would have been limited to people with perceptible anatomical differences. Variant genitals alone may affect one in 2,500 people today, but we do not know what that number may have looked like in ancient Israel.[30] Nevertheless, it seems likely that some small but significant number of individuals in ancient Israel would have, at birth, possessed an anatomical configuration that defied easy categorization as either male or female. There are also those whose anatomy might have become less clearly "male" or "female" later in life, by choice or accident. One obvious example is the eunuch, a term which apparently signified a range of abnormal male anatomical configurations, many of them inflicted on purpose.[31]

I do not deny that the ancients, including biblical authors, had some concepts of what qualities pertained to men and what qualities to women. Certain modes of physical appearance, behaviors, and skills were expected of men and certain others of women.[32] I do, however, argue that we do not know how fixed and universal those concepts of gender were, or what they included. While we do not know much if anything about individuals in ancient Israelite societies who fell outside the traditional two-gender system, recent research has shown evidence of sex and gender ambiguity and fluidity in other parts of the ancient Mediterranean basin.[33] For instance, individuals in ancient Mesopotamia with non-normative genitals at birth were recognized as not fitting into the categories of male or female, and "castrates, eunuchs, transsexuals, and men with undescended testicles" may have formed what Julia Asher-Greve terms a "third gender."[34] Uri Gabbay's research on the *kalû* supports the idea of more than two genders in ancient Mesopotamia. Gabbay argues that the Akkadian word used to describe this gender-ambiguous cultic functionary, *kalû* or *gala*, has etymological roots

signifying that it means “one who is both,” or what Gabbay characterizes as “third gender.”[35] The goddess Ishtar was credited with the power to turn men into women and women into men, suggesting more fluidity than we would expect if ancient Mesopotamia had a strict gender binary.[36] There are several examples from the Ancient Near East of figures whose physical appearance and clothing do not match in gender, such as a statue from Mari with breasts, narrow waist, wide hips, and no beard, wearing men’s clothing and with a male name.[37]

In Egypt, too, gender is sometimes surprisingly fluid. There are several examples of the female pharaoh Hatshepsut represented in men’s clothing and with a beard.[38] The Nile deity Hapi appears with breasts that sometimes are shown leaking fluid to symbolize the fertility associated with the river; sometimes Hapi is shown with a penis and sometimes without one.[39] Kathlyn M. Cooney identifies several bronze figurines from Egypt of the Late Period to Ptolemaic Period (522–30 BCE) that combine female and male elements. For example, the front of one figure depicts a male deity with an erect penis who stands atop a crocodile, ready to spear it, while the reverse side fuses the back of the male deity with a goddess in the form of a lioness. She writes, “This bronze figure combines youth and fertility, male and female, as well as human and animal, providing its owner with many divine aspects in one small figurine, if not in one body.” She also points out that a late hymn to Neith discovered at Esna, which discusses the goddess as a primeval creator who is two parts masculine and one part feminine, provides a possible context for such androgynous figures.[40]

The Assyriologist Kathleen McCaffrey proposes evaluating gender-non-conforming images using a multi-gender system in which the genders are normative male, normative female, variant male, and variant female.[41] It has even been proposed that the biblical authors did not have in mind a two-sex system but rather only one sex, “with human sex a continuum of more- and less-perfectly executed maleness.”[42] Men were effectively the only sex because they were the one that mattered. Using this schema, individuals with typical male anatomy who married women and fathered children would have been the pinnacle of manliness, male-gendered individuals who failed to conform to biological or social expectations for maleness would have been lesser men, and women, rather than being a category of value in themselves, were essentially not-men. In any event, based on evidence from the ancient Near East, I would argue that we cannot assume that there were two and only two genders in ancient Israel, or that the genders that did exist corresponded precisely to perceived

biological sex or to modern expectations of gender traits and roles.

Further, what are we to make of individuals whom ancient Israelite society would have considered female, but who lacked the traditional female concerns seen by Brenner and Dijk-Hemmes? Examples might include women without children, unmarried women, divorced women, those who did not menstruate, or women attracted to other women—whether or not they could have acted on such an attraction. Do such women still have F voices? Brenner and Dijk-Hemmes endeavored not to be essentialist in their proposal of M and F concerns and voices, but instead to consider the differing social roles men and women would have inhabited in the biblical world. But what if some women (and, for that matter, some men) diverged enough from any gender standard so as not to inhabit one of two gender-based social roles?

The idea of gendering texts falls short when those who use it fail to engage with gender performance theory. Performance theory, most closely associated with Judith Butler, argues that gender has no inherent substance—certainly no one-to-one mapping of a complete gender onto one of two straightforward biological realities. Rather gender is constructed through the "stylized repetition of acts."[43] The society in which one lives compels one to adopt gender and dictates the set of actions, preferences, and physical affectations that make up a specific gender. Gender is also heavily charged, highly consequential, and complicated to challenge, so one cannot don and doff genders at will.[44] Nevertheless, all gender is performance, even when there is an ostensible "match" between one's physical body and the set of traits and behaviors one puts on. Applied to the practice of gendering texts, this suggests that, even if there are distinctive M and F voices to be found in the Hebrew Bible, they would be reflections not of some deep underlying reality of gender in the ancient world, but of the "stylized repetition of acts" used to construct the genders of "male" and "female." Perhaps a more productive project would be to look at the performance itself rather than seeking the gender of the one doing the performing. When a biblical text strikes the scholar as feminine, the scholar should start by interrogating why that is, if possible teasing out whether the characteristics that read as feminine do so because of something inherent in the text, or whether modern presuppositions about gender influence their interpretation. If there is biblical or extrabiblical ancient Near Eastern evidence for the observed characteristics connoting femininity in the world of the text, the scholar should look at what such femininity does for the text. Why might an author—of whatever gender—have chosen this voice? What purpose does gendered language serve in a text? Ken Stone articulates this point in his

methodological essay on gender criticism:

> Which characters embody cultural gender norms successfully, and which characters fall short of such norms or embody them in unexpected ways? Might a character's success or failure at embodying gender norms result from a strategy to cast that character in a particular light, whether positive or negative? Is the text itself always successful at manipulating gender assumptions? Do biblical texts, like persons, sometimes fail to "cite" gender conventions in expected ways or according to dominant norms?[45]

Asking these questions leads to deeper interrogations of gender and its ramifications than do attempts to unearth M or F traditions behind texts.

Queer theory also helps expose some of the problems with scholarly work that uses Brenner and Dijk-Hemmes's methodology to gender texts. Here, I use the queer-theoretical language and concepts outlined above to point out issues with scholarly work that built on Brenner and Dijk-Hemmes's methods. For example, the piece by Alice Ogden Bellis about Proverbs makes assumptions, just as Brenner and Dijk-Hemmes did, about what constitutes female concerns and voice. In Bellis's proposal, women in ancient Israel would have wanted to discourage men from having illicit sex, for the benefit both of the women themselves and of the larger society. After all, one could imagine women who might have an interest in *not* discouraging married men from sex outside marriage, especially in a world where polygyny was permitted. For example, an unmarried woman, widow, or divorcee could hope to use sexuality as a tool to become the second wife of an already-married man. Likewise, a woman working as a prostitute stakes her very livelihood on married men who stray. There are plenty of possible F voices that would not make sense as being behind Proverbs 7.

Bauckham's article arguing for a male author adopting a female voice in the Book of Ruth also shows some of the problems in Brenner and Dijk-Hemmes's methods. As Bauckham argues, a voice that sounds F to some ears does not necessitate female authorship or even underlying female literary traditions. Though Bauckham does not phrase his argument this way, his account describes a male author putting on literary drag, performing his idea of the feminine. Bauckham's piece shows how facile M and F designations can be, since such determinations ignore literary artifice.

Henten's argument about traces of F voices in the predominantly M text of Judith points out another problem of trying to gender texts: claiming to find "traces" of one gender's voice in a text predominantly composed of the other's leaves unanswered questions about how those traces got there. As Henten notes in his conclusion, "One can only speculate about the original context of the [F]

passages of Judith discussed in this final section. There is a possibility that they were originally composed as a parody of male leadership for a female audience. But it is impossible to demonstrate this convincingly." One wonders why a parody of men ends up in a book Henten claims otherwise represents an M voice that has firm ideas about the proper social role for women.[46] When the gendering process finds a mix of M and F voices in a single text, they can make strange bedfellows indeed. Perhaps we can acknowledge the multiplicity and contradictions inherent in biblical texts without trying to ascribe them to the voice of one of two apparently monolithic genders.

Cook's use of Brenner and Dijk-Hemmes is also problematic when one examines it through a gender lens. While I appreciate his nuanced argument that a text may contain more than one type of voice, his division of Habakkuk 3 into gendered voices seems arbitrary and tautological. To assume that only a female speaker would compare her feet to a doe, or that the doe must represent the female voice's anxiety about war, is an overreading of the text. Cook also seems to begin with the premise that victory songs are intrinsically feminine. If one does not accept that premise, the rest of his argument is significantly less convincing. In addition, the idea of androgyny, that an individual can combine elements of the masculine and the feminine, assumes a rigid division between the two. Not only is this an inaccurate representation of gender as scientists and theorists today understand it, but it is most likely an inaccurate picture of gender as it was lived in the ancient Near East.

Lee's book, which argues for discernible M and F voices in the prophetic books, attempts to reinscribe women in what is traditionally perceived as an especially male set of texts. However, Lee ends up reifying gender stereotypes, which is virtually unavoidable when one uses this method. In Lee's telling, not only do F voices and M voices have a completely different set of concerns, they also sound totally different. For example, she argues that men used doublet sound patterns while women used triplets.[47] Thus, when doublets and triplets alternate, she sees female and male voices alternating. In the process of seeking women's voices among the prophets, Lee ends up arguing that men and women in ancient Israel were so fundamentally different that they spoke what amounts to distinct dialects with different vocabularies.

"Un-gendering" Texts: Toward a Conclusion

One could critique *On Gendering Texts* on several grounds; indeed Athalya Brenner herself offers critical reflections on this type of scholarly analysis. In a review essay when the book first came out, Sara Mandell points out that looking for the gendered oral roots behind biblical texts is a faulty method because not all biblical texts have oral prehistory. She also criticizes the "double voice" concept as circular reasoning.[48] Others, such as J. Cheryl Exum, argue that the criteria used to determine M and F voice is always culturally dependent: "the problem remains how the critic, from a prior position within a gendered discourse with established notions of masculine and feminine, can decide what constitutes M and F without reinscribing those very generalizations in the text."[49] Timothy H. Lim suggests that many of the passages Brenner and Dijk-Hemmes highlight as F texts were probably written by men about traditionally female activities, such as marriage and childbearing. Lim also writes that what qualifies as F voice is overly broad: encompassing women's speeches, men's speeches about women, women's words filtered through male speech, women's perspectives, or women's rituals.[50]

This essay builds on these early critiques using a gender-critical lens. While the goals of Brenner and Dijk-Hemmes in *On Gendering Texts* are laudable, from a queer-theoretical standpoint the book's methodology is deeply flawed. While, at the time of its writing, queer theory was in its infancy and had yet to make its mark on biblical studies, scholars today ought to be aware of the problems with seeking the "true gender" of a voice in the biblical text. Here, I argue against using what we can today clearly recognize as an essentialist and inaccurate gender model to interpret the Bible. While scholars who still cite this methodology aim to welcome women back in to a set of texts that can feel exclusionary, they end up reifying gender binaries that never truly existed in the texts or in the societies that produced them. This methodological approach is ultimately not helpful for feminist interpretive goals.

Gender-based methods, by contrast, offer promising insights for those who wish to read the biblical texts more positively for women. Queer-influenced biblical scholars produce surprising new ideas for welcoming people of all genders and sexualities back to the texts. More helpful than parceling texts into one of two absolute categories, queer scholarship explores the ways in which biblical narratives produce, reinforce, undermine, or even explode ideas of gender. In other words, queer criticism can "un-gender" the texts.

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[1] Athalya Brenner and Fokkelien van Dijk Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden / New York, NY: Brill, 1993).

[2] Each scholar wrote her own chapters for the book. Thus, I refer to each scholar individually when I quote from *On Gendering Texts*. When I speak about the book or its common methodology more generally, I credit both authors.

[3] S. D. Goitein, “Women as Creators of Biblical Genres (trans. Michael Carasik),” *Prooftexts* 8 (1988): 29.

[4] Brenner and Dijk Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts*, 2.

[5] Ibid., 7.

[6] Ibid., 13.

[7] Ibid., 24–26.

[8] Ibid., 106.

[9] Ibid., 27. Dijk-Hemmes applies the double voice concept to the Song of Songs, see her “The ‘Double Voice’ of Her Desire,” in *The Double Voice of Her Desire: Texts by Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes*, ed. Jonneke Bekkenkamp and Freda Droes (Tools for Biblical Study 6; trans. David E. Orton; Leiden: Deo, 2005), 179–84.

[10] Brenner and Dijk Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts*, 79.

[11] Alice Ogden Bellis, “The Gender and Motives of the Wisdom Teacher in Proverbs 7,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 6 (1996): 15–22.

[12] Richard Bauckham, “The Book of Ruth and the Possibility of a Feminist Canonical Hermeneutic,” *Biblical Interpretation* 5 (1997): 32–33.

[13] Ibid., 31.

[14] Jan Willem van Henten, “Judith as Alternative Leader: A Rereading of Judith 7–13,” in *Esther, Judith, and Susanna*, ed. Athalya Brenner (A Feminist Companion to the Bible 7; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 224–52.

[15] Mark S. Smith, “Warfare Song as Warrior Ritual,” in *Warfare, Ritual, and Symbol in Biblical and Modern Contexts*, ed. Brad E. Kelle, Frank Ritchel Ames, and Jacob L. Wright (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2014), 169–70.

[16] Steve Cook, “Habakkuk 3, Gender, and War,” *lectio difficilior: European Electronic Journal for Feminist Exegesis* 1 (2009): 1–16.

[17] Nancy C. Lee, *Hannevi’ah and Hannah: Hearing Women Biblical Prophets in a Women’s Lyrical Tradition* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 7.

[18] Ibid., 23. Lee cites one linguistic source in support of her argument that “[d]ifferences in the sound patterns of men’s and women’s speech and in composing, the same language in the same culture, are found in numerous traditional cultures.” Ibid., 5. However, this appears to be the only linguistic source she refers to in her study. Arguing for major gender differences in phonology would seem to necessitate much greater engagement with linguistic research.

[19] Athalya Brenner, “Gendering In/By the Hebrew Bible: Ten Years Later,” *Old Testament Essays* 15 (2002): 50.

[20] Ibid., 44.

[21] Ibid., 45.

[22] With the caveat that indexing of citations in the humanities is very disorganized, I can find only the following citation: Gerald O. West, “Taming Texts of Terror: Reading (against) the Gender Grain of 1 Timothy,” *Scriptura* 86 (2004): 160–73.

[23] Katharine J. Dell, “Review,” *Vetus Testamentum* 44.3 (1994): 420–22.

[24] Deryn Guest, “From Gender Reversal to Genderfuck: Reading Jael through a Lesbian Lens,” in *Bible Trouble: Queer Reading at the Boundaries of Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Theresa J. Hornsby and Ken Stone (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2011), 19–20.

[25] Athalya Brenner and Fokkelien van Dijk Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden / New York, NY: Brill, 1993), 13.

[26] Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2008), 3. Also see Leonard Sax, “How Common Is Intersex? A Response to Anne Fausto-Sterling,” *Journal of Sex Research* 39 (2002): 174–78. Sax counts as intersex only people whose chromosomes do not match their anatomical expression or those whose anatomy is not classifiable as either male or female, leading him to estimate that intersex people make up only about .018 percent of the population. Fausto-Sterling, by contrast, also counts individuals with disorders such as Klinefelter syndrome, in which someone possesses an XXY chromosomal configuration. Such an individual looks male but may have reduced secondary sex characteristics and be infertile. While I understand that individuals with Klinefelter and other chromosomal or hormonal abnormalities may not be medically labeled as intersex today, because these conditions can produce physical characteristics that may historically have led to classification as something other than purely male or female, I would argue that scholars of the ancient world should consider them as intersex.

[27] Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 78–79.

[28] For example, third gender or two-spirit among some Native Americans, or *hijras* in India. Ibid., 108–109.

[29] Jonathan Stökl, "Gender 'Ambiguity' in Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy? A Reassessment of the Data behind a Popular Theory," in *Prophets Male and Female: Gender and Prophecy in the Hebrew Bible, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Ancient Near East*, ed. Jonathan Stökl and Corinne L. Carvalho (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2013), 64.

[30] Susannah Cornwall, "Introduction," chap. in *Intersex, Theology, and the Bible: Troubling Bodies in Church, Text, and Society* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1.

[31] Per Kathryn Ringrose, "Greek sources of Late Antiquity, at least in polite prose, used the term *eunuch* to encompass a diverse class of individuals without reference to the extent or nature of their castration, the age at which they were castrated, or their social or civil status. By the second century A.D. . . . the word was also a blanket term covering a variety of genital mutilations, ranging from the cutting of the *vas deferens* (as in a modern vasectomy) to the removal of one or both testicles to the total removal of all sexual organs." See Kathryn M. Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant: Eunuchs and the Social Construction of Gender in Byzantium* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 13–14.

[32] Julia Asher-Greve, "Decisive Sex, Essential Gender," in *Sex and Gender in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 47th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Helsinki, July 2–6, 2001*, Vol. 1, ed. Simo Parpola and Robert M. Whiting (Helsinki, Finland: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2002), 15. See also Julia M. Asher-Greve, "The Essential Body: Mesopotamian Conceptions of the Gendered Body," *Gender & History* 9.3 (1997). Asher-Greve notes that visual and written depictions of people from ancient Mesopotamia are highly sexed and gendered, indicating attributes such as anatomy, clothing, and occupation. She also cites several examples that contain asexual or ambiguously sexed or gendered depictions. Contra Asher-Greve, see Zainab Bahrani, *Women of Babylon: Gender and Representation in Mesopotamia* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2001). Bahrani sees a strict gender binary in ancient Mesopotamia. See also Deut. 22:5.

[33] See Lauren E. Talalay and Tracey Cullen, "Sexual Ambiguity in Plank Figures from Bronze Age Cyprus," in *Engendering Aphrodite: Women and Society in Ancient Cyprus*, ed. Diane L. Bolger and Nancy J. Serwint (Ann Arbor, MI: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2002), 181–93; Deborah Sweeney, "Sex and Gender," in *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, ed. Willeke Wendrich (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA, 2011), 1–14.

[34] Asher-Greve, "Sex and Gender in the Ancient Near East," 21.

[35] Uri Gabbay, "The Akkadian Word for 'Third Gender': The Kalû (Gala) Once Again," in *Proceedings of the 51st Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale*, ed. Robert D. Biggs, Jennie Myers, and Martha T. Roth (Ancient Oriental Civilization 62; Chicago, IL: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2008), 49–56.

[36] Kathleen McCaffrey, "Reconsidering Gender Ambiguity in Mesopotamia: Is a Beard Just a Beard?," in *Sex and Gender in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 47th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Helsinki, July 2–6, 2001*, ed. Simo Parpola and Robert M. Whiting (Vol. 2; Helsinki, Finland: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2002), 379–80.

[37] Ibid., 380–81.

[38] Ibid., 390–91.

[39] Malayna Evans Williams, "Signs of Creation: Sex, Gender, Categories, Religion and the Body in Ancient Egypt" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Chicago, 2011), 223.

[40] Kathlyn M. Cooney, "Androgynous Bronze Figurines in Storage at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art," in *Servant of Mut: Studies in Honor of Richard A. Fazzini*, ed. Sue H. D'Auria (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 66.

[41] McCaffrey, "Sex and Gender in the Ancient Near East," 388.

[42] Cornwall, "Introduction," 14. Cornwall cites Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (rev. ed.; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 8.

[43] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (second ed.; New York, NY: Routledge, 1999), 179.

[44] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993).

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[46] Henten, "Judith as Alternative Leader," 252–53.

[47] Lee, *Hannevi'ah and Hannah*, 15.

[48] Sara Mandell, "Searching for a Woman's Voice: Review Essay," *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 13.2 (Winter 1995): 87. Mandell also criticized the work as derivative and not objective.

[49] J. Cheryl Exum, "Feminist Study of the Old Testament," in *Text in Context: Essays by Members of the Society for Old Testament Study*, ed. A. D. H. Mayes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 101.

[50] Timothy H. Lim, "The Book of Ruth and Its Literary Voice," in *Reflection and Refraction: Studies in Biblical Historiography in Honour of A. Graeme Auld*, ed. W. Brian Aucker and Robert Rezetko (Boston, MA: Brill, 2007), 269. Lim writes further on p. 270: "To say that depiction of war and violence is specifically male and not female is facile and simply untrue whether in modern or ancient literature."

CHAPTER 30

QUEERING DELILAH WITH CRITICAL THEORY AND GENDERED BIBLE HERMENEUTICS

CAROLINE BLYTH

TREACHEROUS temptress, avaricious whore, heartless betrayer of godly men—these are just some of the appellations commonly used by biblical scholars to describe Delilah, Samson's ruinous love interest in Judges 16. Over the centuries, interpreters of this ancient text have regularly sculpted Sorek's most infamous inhabitant into the sensuous form of the femme fatale, the fatal woman whose irresistible yet perfidious allure drags even the strongest of men to their knees. Yet, if we look closely at Judges 16, we see that the narrator reveals very little about Delilah's character. She remains cloaked in textual gaps and ambiguities, rendering many facets of her persona too vague for the reader to discern. The narrative even omits the most basic features of Delilah's characterization, including her ethnicity, sexuality, and social status. The result is that her gap-ridden presence in the text remains disquietingly inscrutable.

Given the mystery that looms over Delilah, why has her reputation as a femme fatale remained so ubiquitous within the interpretive traditions surrounding Judges 16? What impels biblical exegetes to identify her decisively as Samson's treacherous lover-betrayer? This chapter suggests that these interpreters are guided as much by the socially constructed discourses of gender and sexuality in their own socio-cultural milieus as they are by Delilah's characterization in Judges 16. These discourses draw together various

ideologies, attitudes, and practices pertaining to gender roles, sex, and sexuality, weaving them into a fabric upon which people trace familiar patterns and decipher their own experiences and beliefs.[1] Often reliant on essentialist gender binaries of "female" and "male," they attribute certain physical, psychological, and behavioral characteristics (or "essences") to women, which are assumed to be transcultural, historical, and unchangeable.[2] Such characteristics are typically articulated as being the *opposite* to those embodied by men. Thus, women are considered "naturally" weak, sexually passive, maternal, and nurturing while men are powerful, sexually aggressive, and combative. Women who fail to conform to these discursive patterns of "feminine" behavior are subsequently labeled as deviant, if not dangerous, because they "threaten" to subvert accepted gender roles which underpin a stable social order.

One prominent example of a "dangerous" woman is the femme fatale. This figure is a ubiquitous socio-cultural creation that encodes all that is considered unsafe and undesirable about women who reject essentialist gender roles.[3] This figure embodies women's social and sexual agency, their eschewal of domesticity and maternity, and their encroachment upon traditionally "masculine" territories of violence, sex, and power.[4] The femme fatale's ability to expose the fragility and instability of established gender binaries renders her a not-to-be-tolerated "Other," who needs to be marginalized, regulated, or even destroyed. She also serves as a potent emblem of the ways that sex, gender, and power have become inextricably interwoven within societies and cultures across space and time.[5]

The contemporary gender discourses about the femme fatale are central to interpretations of Delilah's literary persona. Despite the multiple gaps surrounding her character, Delilah clearly fails to fit into essentialist categories of "natural" womanhood on a number of counts.[6] She is active in the traditionally "masculine" realms of political and military operations. Delilah appears to transgress the traditional role of motherhood, even eschewing marriage altogether. Finally, she plays a decisive role in capturing a man whom whole armies of Philistines failed to contain. Interpreters identify these acts of gender subversion as fundamental "essences" of her characterization: she behaves the way she does because she is a certain "type," a fatal woman who offers a grim warning to audiences about the dangers of women's unregulated sexual and social agency. Consequently, gender discourse offers a familiar template which readers can use to decode Delilah's ambivalent characterization in Judges 16.

The rest of this chapter begins to chip away at these traditional interpretations

of Delilah's character. It draws on alternative discourses of gender and sexuality to perform a "queered" gap-filling exercise within Judges 16. These discourses emerge from the rich hermeneutical emporium of queer theory, a branch of critical theory that challenges and disrupts essentialist reading strategies.[7] Like all forms of critical theory, queer theory has a "transformative impulse," which refuses to accept established paradigms and truth claims. This theory argues instead that normative gender categories should be interrogated and deconstructed.[8] It thus liberates interpreters from restrictive and socially "coerced" thinking patterns, allowing them to develop new and liberating knowledges about texts and the societies that produce them.[9]

Particularly, queer theory provokes readers to disturb and dismantle essentialist heteronormative binaries of gender and sexuality that exert a hegemonic influence over innumerable contemporary cultures. Queer theory posits that the various categories produced by these binaries, such as "male" and "female," "masculine" and "feminine," "heterosexual" and "homosexual," are historically contingent and socially constructed, rather than natural or universal.[10] Moreover, queer theory insists that gender is not a biological or transcultural phenomenon that directs people's behavior. Rather, it is performative: developed via a network of culturally constructed behaviors and beliefs that people learn to *perform* until it is considered a "natural" part of their gendered selves. As Judith Butler explain: "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender . . . . [I]dentity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results."[11] In other words, gender does not identify who a person "is" in a biological or ontological sense. Instead, it is what they "do" and how they have learned to perform according to the dominant discourses at play within their socio-cultural location.[12]

Given this constructed nature of gender, queer theorists engage in *de*construction. They challenge the binaries that underpin social identity, and root out the irruptions within these binaries to expose their impermanence and their potential to be subverted or queered.[13] Approaching cultural texts and traditions with "an eye towards disruption,"[14] these theorists highlight the incoherence of social identity, its performative roots and potential for limitless variety and disorder. As Gerard Loughlin explains, "Queer seeks to outwit identity. It serves those who find themselves and others to be other than the characters prescribed by an identity. It marks not by defining, but by taking up a distance from what is perceived as the normative."[15]

By welcoming queer theory into biblical studies, we can oust traditional

interpretative strategies from their heteronormative and essentialist comfort zones so they are confronted by the subversive potential of biblical texts. For reading these texts queerly compels us to seek out their idiosyncratic curves and bumps, so often "straightened out" by traditional interpretations.[16] In other words, biblical texts may *already* articulate instabilities and subversions of social constructs such as gender and sexuality. Yet, their subversive potential is too often eclipsed by traditional readings that follow essentialist trajectories. Queer interpretations disturb this normative trajectory, allowing the inherent queerness of the text to shine through. Judges 16 is one prominent example of an intrinsically queer text. Its numerous gaps and ambiguities invite readers to relish its capacity for disruption.

In sum, this chapter casts a queer feminist eye over Judges 16, focusing in particular on Delilah's characterization.[17] It interrogates the very "straight" ways that essentialist interpretive traditions have typically made sense of her textual presence, identifying her as a hypersexualized femme fatale. More specifically, the essay considers Delilah's sexuality and gender through a queer lens, luring readers into the subversive spaces of the narrative, challenging essentialist reading strategies, and thus illuminating this biblical persona with new critical insights.

Before beginning, however, I want to add a word about awkward relationships. On setting out to perform a queer feminist reading of Delilah's characterization in Judges 16, readers remember that feminist theory and queer theory have always been uneasy bedfellows. This discomfort has arisen not least because queer circles have accused feminism of perpetuating those same essentialist assertions about gender normativity that it claims to challenge.[18] As Judith Butler argues, through its insistence on categorizing women into a homogenous group, feminism forgets that "woman" is not "a coherent and stable subject," but a socially dictated social role that "women" are taught to perform.[19] Additionally, gender is not the only defining factor in constructing identity. Rather, every woman is composed of multiple intersecting identities, including gender, race, class, and sexuality, which prescribe their social and sexual selves.[20] By ignoring the intersectional, performative, and heterogeneous nature of identity, feminism continues to reify heteronormative gender binaries that promulgate multiple inequalities. In other words, feminism's focus on "women" as a distinctive group threatens "to limit and constrain in advance the very cultural possibilities that feminism is supposed to open up."[21]

While I sympathize with Butler's critique, I share the conviction of feminist scholars, such as Kathy Rudy and Teresa Hornsby, that a queer feminist

theoretical approach is both plausible *and* essential. After all, both queer theory and feminist theory share the common goal of creating new understandings of texts and contexts, which can be both transformative and liberating for people of all sexual and gender identities. Drawing on this mutual vision, a queer feminist reading strategy has the potential to "undo" some of the damage done by centuries of essentialist biblical interpretation. It offers new ways of reading texts that have been used throughout history to prescribe and proscribe women's social and sexual agency.[22] To seek out such potential, and practice it, is an ethical necessity. As Hornsby reminds us: "Because of the position of authority that the Bible has held and continues to hold in formative public debate it is a moral imperative to do no less."[23] While this chapter echoes Hornsby's pragmatic acknowledgment that practicing a queer feminist hermeneutic will never "topple dynasties or rewrite laws," it also embraces both her and Rudy's insistence on the potential to chip away at heteronormative, essentialist discourses that sustain gender inequalities, leaving them a little wobblier than they were before.[24]

Gender Trouble and Sex Talk in Judges 16

According to Judith Butler, there is nothing like a bit of "gender trouble" to chase away those essentialist blues.[25] In order to challenge the "naturalized and reified notions of gender that support masculine hegemony and heterosexist power,"[26] she proposes people engage in gender performances that *subvert* these notions, thereby highlighting their transience and fragility. In other words, to contest essentialist and oppressive binaries of gender and sexuality, everyone has to perform in ways that expose the *in*essential quality of these binaries, in the hope that, eventually, they will be dislodged.[27]

Delilah's character in Judges 16 is an expert in gender trouble, bending and breaking gendered roles and expectations traditionally attributed to biblical (and sometimes contemporary) women. These subversive acts impel many biblical interpreters to classify her as a dangerous *fatal* woman whose gender disruption is the source of her deadly potential. That is, Delilah breaches those essentialist gender binaries dominant within exegetes' own socio-cultural milieus, which prescribe how women should behave. Consequently, they link her unorthodox *gender* performance to notions of *sexual* and *social* treachery, flagging her as a troubling source of chaos that cannot be tolerated.

Consider, for example, the curious silence surrounding Delilah's social status. Compared to other biblical women, whose genealogies and positions in the patriarchal household are typically disclosed as markers of their identity, the narrator omits any details about Delilah's tribal and kinship affiliations. Likewise, there is no suggestion that she lived under the authority of a father, husband, or other male guardian. These textual gaps render Delilah "virtually rootless" in time and space, defying social categorization.[28] Her seeming "freedom" from male authority grants her a certain degree of agency to conduct both her relationship with Samson and her negotiations with the Philistine elders. Such agency is rare among female characters in the Hebrew Bible,[29] being identified more often as a "masculine" prerogative. Delilah therefore appears to stir up gender trouble from the outset. Her social agency confirms, to some interpreters, that she is a dangerous woman.[30]

In addition to her unusual social agency, Delilah's character challenges gender roles by her refusal to conform to the social functions typically prescribed for biblical women. She is apparently unmarried and ultimately betrays the man who loves her, rather than be domesticated as his devoted wife. Even more shockingly, she evades that most revered biblical role of motherhood, a fact that renders her unquestionably "queer." Indeed, according to some interpreters, Delilah does not simply eschew motherhood; she perverts it. In Judg. 16:19, Samson lies bald and helpless on Delilah's lap, after she has denuded him of his strength-giving hair. In the Hebrew Bible traditions, lying on a woman's lap or knees (*birkayim*) is a motif associated with childbirth and mothering.[31] This image is enough for Robert Alter, among others, to accuse Delilah's character of scorning traditional maternal responsibilities—selflessly caring for and protecting her "child." He notes that Judg. 16:19 offers readers a "powerful image of the seductive woman lulling the mighty hero and reducing him to a baby in her lap."[32] Or, as Anton Kozlovic insists: "It is the mother-like actions of Delilah-the-sexy-non-mother that facilitated Samson's ultimate demise."[33]

Delilah's participation in Samson's downfall is another element to her persona that disrupts gender expectations. She singlehandedly masterminds the capture of Samson, a feat that whole armies of Philistine warriors were unable to achieve.[34] To do so, she competently engages in political and military operations, negotiating with political leaders (vv. 5, 8, 12, 18, 21) before independently strategizing and executing her plan. She thus performs a further act of gender trouble, undermining those essentialist expectations that claim politics and warfare as typically "masculine" pursuits.

Moreover, just as Delilah queers her own gender performance, she simultaneously drags Samson into a subversive performance. As Susan Niditch notes, Samson's hair-cutting may represent his symbolic "castration" or "womanization," hair being traditionally associated with male genitals and sexual potency.[35] Delilah's role in Samson's hair loss symbolizes her "stripping and subjugation" of the Hebrew warrior, compelling him to adopt those traditionally "feminine" roles of weakness and passivity. Niditch states: "The cutting of Samson's hair, ironically accomplished by a woman's treachery, makes him into a woman, the subdued one, the defeated warrior."[36] In other words, Delilah (a woman) does things to Samson (a man) that throw both of their performative gender roles up in the air and let them crash to the ground. She engages in a gender-bending activity that demonstrates that these roles, understood to be inerrant and eternal, are infinitely ephemeral and breakable.

In addition to her gender-bending subversiveness, Delilah also demonstrates a remarkable knack for gender fluidity. She performs roles traditionally ascribed to a man. Yet, adorned in hyperfeminized drag, Delilah simultaneously plays the traditional role of Samson's querulous lover to perfection (Judg. 16:15, 19). She besots this naïve Hebrew warrior until he reveals to her the secret of his strength. By repeatedly zigzagging back and forth between traditionally dualistic gender performances, Delilah demonstrates just how artificial these binaries really are. Breaking all the gender rules, she is cross-dresser par excellence. Neither fully "man" nor fully "woman," Delilah puts on the disguise of combatant, politician, mother-betrayer, *and* needy mistress. She never sojourns long in any of these roles, but belongs in all of them and, simultaneously, in none of them. She is a queerly subversive presence in the narrative, defying any specific gender definition.

By challenging essentialist and heteronormative prerogatives of gendered power, Delilah instills in readers a gnawing sense of anxiety and uncertainty. To make sense of her disruptive potential, traditional scholars typecast her as a femme fatale, a figure known to cause chaos through the rejection of traditional gender roles. They pin down her dangerously gender-fluid body, labelling it as an uncanny aberration and the exception that proves the necessary rule of patriarchal and heteronormative pre-eminence. What is more, Delilah's propensity for gender trouble evokes interpreters' fears about her *sexual* trouble, despite it being a feature of her characterization that remains unarticulated in Judges 16. As a result, her character is regularly imbued with a multiplicity of hypersexual and heterosexual overtones that conform with essentialist and heteronormative discourses of female sexuality. Through these interpretations,

Delilah transforms into Samson's lethal lover, a femme fatale whose sexual allure is so enticing that even a super-strong, God-chosen warrior is powerless to resist.

Take, for example, the question of Delilah's relationship with Samson. Most interpretive traditions presume that the duo's relationship was both (hetero)sexual *and* consummated. Consequently, scholars describe Delilah as Samson's "mistress,"[37] his "wife,"[38] and his "lover."[39] Additionally, Delilah's sexual agency is reworked in these interpretations. She is often characterized as a "temptress,"[40] a "seductress,"[41] and a "cynical manipulator of sensuality."[42] Indeed, according to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, nineteenth-century author of *The Women's Bible*, Delilah represents "the treacherous, the sinister, the sensuous side of woman," who uses her sexuality "as a snare to beguile the man whose lust she has aroused."[43] As Carolyn Pressler notes, Delilah is, in the eyes of many interpreters, the "quintessential deceptive seductress" who heartlessly seduces innocent men and brings about their downfall.[44]

But a closer look at the text of Judges 16 reveals that the story does not explicitly include these condemnatory evaluations of Delilah's sexuality. The narrator informs readers that Samson "loved"(*ʾhb*) Delilah (v. 4), although it is not revealed if she loved him in return. There are no explicit references to the couple indulging in any form of sexual activity.[45] Further, while some interpreters suggest that Samson's slumber on Delilah's lap (v. 19) could have been post-coital,[46] the text is too vague to confirm this claim. Moreover, no grammatical or linguistic clue hints at the possibility that Delilah relies on her sexual allure to complete her mission for the Philistines. To be sure, she appeals to Samson's emotions when prompting him to reveal his secret (Judg. 16:15). Yet, her complaint is far from erotically charged. She pleads: "How can you say 'I love you' when your heart is not with me?" The choice of the words 'love' and 'heart' are less seductive than sentimental, softening Delilah's accusation that Samson's game-playing belies his claims of love.[47] While her persistent speech causes Samson great distress (vv. 16–17), it is not sexualized in either form or content.[48] Given this lack of detail surrounding Delilah's sexual presence in Judges 16, it appears that interpreters' evaluations of her character as a hypersexualized femme fatale rely more on the heteronormative gender discourse than on the biblical text itself.

Queering Dinah in Judges 16

Traditional masculinist interpretations of Judges 16 identify Dinah as a dangerous femme fatale. Queer theory offers ways to disrupt this normative gender discourse. It fills textual gaps about Samson and Delilah's literary liaison with non-essentialist characteristics. For example, following Lori Rowlett's queer approach to this text, readers may wish to entertain the possibility that the couple embarked on a sexual relationship in which traditional (hetero)sexual contours were utterly subverted. Samson's seeming acquiescence to being tied up by Delilah (vv. 6–9, 10–12, 13–14) betrays their shared passion for S/M encounters, with Delilah playing the role of "femme dominatrix" and Samson taking on the part of "butch bottom."[49] Within this scenario, Delilah does not "tempt" an unsuspecting Samson with her erotic allure. Rather, as Rowlett suggests, Samson may have enjoyed being bossed around by this dominatrix and joined in (or even initiated) these games willingly.[50] Later, however, he wearied of their too-safe role play and sought to take it to a far more dangerous level by revealing to Delilah the true secret of his strength.[51]

Within this queer interpretation, Rowlett eclipses heteronormative gender discourses. She allows readers to enjoy an alternative vision of Samson and Delilah's relationship in which sexual intercourse is an optional extra and neither party are necessarily heterosexual or cisgender.[52] Indeed, leaving Rowlett's S/M scenario aside for one moment, we could even suggest that a (hetero)sexualized reading of this duo's relationship is an imaginative leap too far, given the text's depiction of their liaison. To be sure, they spend a lot of time together. But their shared activities do little to infuse their relationship with the scent of sexual promise. Both play various "games" where Delilah ineffectually ties Samson up and Samson "escapes." She braids his hair when he sleeps (Judg.16:13–14), he takes several further naps (vv. 16, 19), and they talk—or rather, Delilah talks *a lot* while Samson makes the occasional response (vv. 6, 10, 13, 15–16). This is hardly the stuff of erotic fantasy, reminding me more of an episode of *Will and Grace* than of *Sex and the City*.

Of course, the socio-cultural significance and discourse on sexual desire (be it same-sex, opposite-sex, somewhere in-between, or something different altogether) has developed considerably since this biblical text was written.[53] Consequently, readers must exercise caution when categorizing Delilah's and Samson's sexualities using contemporary terms and definitions. Yet, *heterosexuality* is one of these contemporary definitions, although biblical scholars usually map it non-problematically onto opposite-sex relationships within the ancient biblical traditions. While there may be a temptation to dismiss Rowlett's S/M scenario as anachronistic, interpretations that assume the duo's

heterosexuality are *equally* anachronistic. When we read this narrative queerly, we are reminded of the text's ambiguity that invites multiple configurations of the relationships therein, not all of which fit neatly into essentialist heteronormative categories.

Finally, a queer interrogation of Delilah's sexuality in Judges 16 needs to address one of the most ubiquitous features of her interpretive afterlives—her identification as a prostitute. The fact that Delilah has no identified male kin yet dwells in her own house (Judg. 16:9, 12), like the prostitute Rahab in Josh. 2:1, is often taken by scholars as a "clue" that she is "on the game" in some sense.[54] Furthermore, Samson's seeming "predilection" for prostitutes (vv. 1–3) also serves this hypothesis.[55] Delilah's behavior has also been described as "promiscuous"[56] and "very prostitute-like,"[57] in that she is deemed to have "bartered" her sexuality for financial gain in a cool-headed and business-like manner. According to Barry Webb, Delilah is "every bit as mercenary as the prostitute of Gaza, but far more upmarket—and lethal,"[58] while in John B. Vickery's eyes, she is simply a "whore at heart."[59]

Casting a queer eye over these interpretations about Delilah's "whorish" persona establishes two points about the essentialist presumptions that underpin them. First, the biblical text makes no explicit or implicit references to Delilah being a prostitute. To be sure, Samson had sex with a prostitute at the beginning of chapter 16, but this liaison does not mean he was attracted *only* to prostitutes. After all, readers never consider his first wife in Judges 14–15 in this light, perhaps because she fits "safely" into the respectable gender roles of daughter and wife. What is more, Delilah living independently in her own home hardly constitutes incontrovertible evidence that she plied the same trade as Rahab. It is just as exegetically likely that she was a woman of means (Jdt. 8:1–8), akin to the Apocryphal Judith, whose hard work and business acumen afforded her a comfortable lifestyle.[60]

For some reason, however, envisioning Delilah as a prostitute seems to make sense to many scholars. Perhaps it reflects their reliance on essentialist discourses of gender and sexuality prevalent in their own reading communities. These discourses "explain" Delilah's seemingly mercenary willingness to betray Samson for hard cash by alluding to the undesirable and aberrant "otherness" of her sexual and social presence. It is far more reassuring to believe that only "certain" women, namely prostitutes, pose such a danger to men rather than imagine a social world in which all women share her disruptive potential for gender trouble. Viewing Delilah as a whore makes it easier for interpreters to regard her as a tainted presence in the narrative, as if she were less valuable, less

worthy of empathy or concern, and much easier to marginalize and revile.[61]

These judgmental evaluations of Delilah as a prostitute also raise a second and related issue. Let us presume for a moment that Delilah's character *is* intended to be a prostitute. At the end of the day, why should this matter? Why should it be consistently understood as a "negative" evaluation of her character's sexual and social provenance? Reading this text queerly, subverting those essentialist discourses that link women's sexuality to their morality and social "worth," suggests that Delilah may have simply enjoyed being a prostitute, and why not? Perhaps she happened to be very good at her job, a distinct possibility given the hefty sum of money the Philistines were prepared to pay her. Or, she may have worked in this profession because it was her only means of survival. After all, she resides in a land that had been torn apart by seemingly endless warring between the Israelites and Philistines. As Avaren Ipsen notes, history betrays a timeless proximity between militarism and prostitution, war being an occasion when sexual exploitation, including rape, slavery, and coerced sex work, is pervasive.[62] Perhaps Delilah was forced into this occupation by the military troops in the region. Perhaps, given her seeming lack of kinship support, prostitution may have been a matter of exigency. After all, many biblical women were often dependent financially and socially on their male kin. As Judith Butler notes, women *cannot* be defined only according to their gender; various other intersecting forces, including their economic and social status, operate to define their identities and the roles they must adopt. Delilah's possible literary persona —a poverty-stricken woman living in a battle-scarred patriarchal landscape— may have impelled her to do whatever she had to in order to survive. Taking the moral high ground around the topic of prostitution is easy if you have a roof over your head, a safe place to sleep, and food in your belly. Without these things, sex can take on more shades of meaning than we care to imagine.

Closing Thoughts

Who is Delilah? For many contemporary biblical interpreters, she is a treacherous femme fatale, whose erotic performance in Judges 16 accentuates the dangerousness of women who subvert traditional gender roles. Yet, as I have argued, this narrative is too chock-full of queer bumps and curves to leave such an evaluation unchallenged. By applying a queer hermeneutic to the text, Delilah's capacity for stirring up gender trouble shines through. It exposes the instability and unreliability of essentialist interpretations of her character. Delilah

may be a sketchy figure in an ancient story, but her location in "one of the most influential mythical and literary documents of our culture"[63] means that her interpretive traditions continue to carry significant influence, both within the hallowed bounds of biblical studies and beyond. When these traditions repeatedly insist on labelling women who subvert heteronormative gender roles as "dangerous," when they identify Delilah's propensity for gender trouble as a sign of her sexual treachery and lethality, they only serve to nourish contemporary essentialist discourses that proscribe women's social and sexual agency. For this reason alone Delilah's ubiquitous representation as a femme fatale in biblical scholarship deserves—no, *demands*—to be queered.

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[1] For the development of this theory of social discourses, see Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith; New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1972).

[2] For further discussion of gender essentialism, see Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1989); Jane Pilcher and Imelda Whelehan, "Essentialism," in *Fifty Key Concepts in Gender Studies*, ed. Jane Pilcher and Imelda Whelehan (London: SAGE Publications, 2004), 42–43.

[3] For a discussion about the ubiquity of the femme fatale phenomenon across different cultures, see William Jankowiak and Angela Ramsey, "Femme Fatale and Status Fatale: A Cross-Cultural Perspective," *Cross-Cultural Research* 34 (2000): 57–69.

[4] Hilary Neroni, *The Violent Woman; Femininity, Narrative, and Violence in Contemporary American Cinema* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), 18–19.

[5] Kate Stables, “The Postmodern Always Rings Twice: Constructing the Femme Fatale in 90s Cinema,” in *Women in Film Noir*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (second ed.; London: BFI Publishers, 1998), 165.

[6] For a fabulous discussion of Delilah’s gender-subverting potential as a hip-hop “playa,” see Wil da C. Gafney, “A Womanist Midrash of Delilah: Don’t Hate the Playa Hate the Game,” in *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse*, ed. Gay L. Byron and Vanessa Lovelace (Semeia Series 85; Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2016), 49–72.

[7] Queer theory is a form of poststructuralist critical theory that arose in the early 1990s from the fields of women’s studies and LGBT studies. Some of the principle theorists to develop and articulate queer theory include Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Gayle Rubin, Jeffrey Weeks, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick.

[8] Stephen Eric Bronner, *Critical Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Very Short Introductions; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 114.

[9] Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School* (Modern European Philosophy; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 1–2.

[10] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990), 5, 7.

[11] Ibid., 25.

[12] Ibid.; two very readable explanations of Butler’s theory of performativity can be found in David Gauntlett, *Media, Gender and Identity: An Introduction* (second ed.; Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 150–1; Kathy Rudy, “Queer Theory and Feminism,” *Women’s Studies: An Inter-Disciplinary Journal* 29 (2000): 201–3.

[13] Rudy, “Queer Theory and Feminism,” 202.

[14] Ibid., 197.

[15] Gerard Loughlin, “Introduction,” in *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, ed. Gerard Loughlin (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 9.

[16] Susannah Cornwall, *Controversies in Queer Theology* (Controversies in Contextual Theology; London: SCM Press, 2011), 119–20. See also Deborah F. Sawyer, “Gender Strategies in Antiquity: Judith’s Performance,” *Feminist Theology* 28 (2001): 13.

[17] For a more detailed discussion of the relationship between feminism and queer theory, see, e.g., Rudy, “Feminism and Queer Theory,” 195–216; Teresa J. Hornsby, “The Annoying Woman: Biblical Scholarship after Judith Butler,” in *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler*, ed. Ellen T. Armour and Susan M. St. Ville (Gender Theory, and Religion; New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006), 71–89; Diane Richardson, Janice McLaughlin, and Mark E. Casey, eds., *Intersections between Feminism and Queer Theory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

[18] Rudy, “Feminism and Queer Theory,” 202.

[19] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 5.

[20] Ibid., 14. As Laurel Schneider insists: “Queer theory loses its cutting edge if it fails to take seriously the depth of significance and the inseparability of race, class, ethnicity, and gender to queer theorizing.” See also Laurel C. Schneider, “Queer Theory,” in *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation*, ed. A. K. M. Adam (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000), 211.

[21] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 147. Far from throwing the baby out with the bath water, though, Butler outlines how to re-conceptualize feminist theory to avoid its propensity towards gender essentialism. Hornsby succinctly summarizes some of these suggestions. See Hornsby, “The Annoying Woman,” 73–75.

[22] Hornsby, “Annoying Woman,” 72.

[23] Ibid., 73.

[24] Ibid., 86; Rudy, “Queer Theory and Feminism,” 214.

[25] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 33–34.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid., 148.

[28] Lilian R. Klein, *From Deborah to Esther: Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 24.

[29] Other examples are Rahab (Joshua 2), the medium of Endor (1 Samuel 28), Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1–4), and the daughters of Zelophehad (Num. 27:1–11).

[30] See, e.g., Lilian R. Klein, “The Book of Judges: Paradigm and Deviation in Images of Women,” in *A Feminist Companion to Judges*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 62; Roger Ryan, *Judges* (Readings: A New Biblical Commentary; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007), 121. J. Cheryl Exum reads Delilah’s agency as a deliberate narrative warning about the dangers of autonomous women. See J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (second ed.; Bloomsbury: T&T Clark, 2015), 64–67.

[31] A woman gives birth “on her knees”; children are born “upon” a parent’s knees; an infant is dandled on a mother’s knees (e.g. Gen. 30:3; 50:23; 2 Kgs. 4:20; Isa. 66:12; Job 3:12). See Susan Ackerman, “What If Judges Had Been Written by a Philistine?,” *Biblical Interpretation* 8 (2000): 39–40.

[32] Robert Alter, *Ancient Israel: The Former Prophets. Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 2013), 191.

[33] Anton Karl Kozlovic, “The Construction of Samson’s Three Lovers in Cecil B. DeMille’s Technicolor Testament, *Samson and Delilah* (1949),” *Women in Judaism* 7 (2010): 6.

[34] Ackerman, “What If,” 35–36.

[35] Susan Niditch, “Samson as Culture Hero, Trickster, and Bandit: The Empowerment of the Weak,” *Catholic Biblical Quaterly* 52.4 (1990): 617.

[36] Ibid. Niditch also notes that, in his shorn state, Samson is put to grind at the mill, a euphemism for sexual intercourse used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Job 31:2; Isa. 37:10). He is the heroic warrior who is ultimately humiliated and presented as a “sexually subdued woman.”

[37] Susan Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1998), 231.

[38] Matthew B. Schwartz and Kalman J. Kaplan, *The Fruit of Her Hands: A Psychology of Biblical Women* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 53.

[39] James L. Crenshaw, “The Samson Saga: Filial Devotion or Erotic Attachment?” *Zeitschrift für altestamentliche Wissenschaft* 84 (1974): 498.

[40] See, e.g. ibid., 487; Ryan, *Judges*, 121.

[41] Alter, *Ancient Israel*, 191.

[42] Nancy Tischler, *Legacy of Eve: Women of the Bible* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1977), 75, 77.

[43] Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman’s Bible: A Classic Feminist Perspective* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications: 2002), 34. Delilah’s “treachery” is also mentioned by Royce M. Victor, “Delilah—A Forgotten Hero (Judges 16:4–21),” in *Joshua and Judges*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Gale A. Yee (Texts @ Contexts;

Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 238.

[44] Carolyn Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 222.

[45] The usual Hebrew euphemisms for sexual intercourse are absent from this narrative: "to know" (*yd'*), 'to go into' (*bw'*), and "to lie with" (*škb*).

[46] Ackerman notes that, in a number of Hebrew biblical passages (e.g. Gen. 30:3; Job 3:12), "knees" or "lap" (*birkayim*) may euphemistically refer to female genitals. Moreover, the narrator uses the *piel* form of the verb *yšn* ("to sleep") in v. 19 to indicate that Delilah did something to make Samson fall asleep. Taken together, these factors lead some interpreters to conclude that the strongman's slumber was likely post-coital. See Ackerman, "What If," 39; cf., e.g., Kozlovic, "Construction of Samson's Three Lovers," 5–6; Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 57.

[47] Barry G. Webb, *The Book of Judges* (New International Commentary on the Old Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 404.

[48] The Hebrew verb used in v. 16 to describe Delilah's verbal harrying (*ṣûq*) carries no inherently sexual or gendered inferences (BDB, 847).

[49] Lori Rowlett, "Violent Femmes and S/M: Queering Samson and Delilah," in *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Ken Stone (JSOTSup 334; Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2001), 106.

[50] Rowlett, "Violent Femmes and S/M," 110–11.

[51] Ibid.

[52] For a fascinating discussion about the fluidity of gender and sexuality within S/M encounters, see Robin Bauer, *Queer BDSM Intimacies: Critical Consent and Pushing Boundaries* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

[53] Contemporary understandings of sexual terms such as "homosexuality," "bisexuality," and "sadomasochism" only began to develop in the nineteenth century within professional discourses (medical, legal, psychoanalytic); see Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2003), 119–35. For a seminal discussion of the social construction of sexuality, see Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (Vol. 1: *An Introduction*; trans. Robert Hurley; New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1978).

[54] Ackerman, "What If," 38.

[55] Ibid.; Kozlovic, "Construction of Samson's Three Lovers," 9.

[56] Charles Halton, "Samson's Last Laugh: The Ś/ŠHQ Pun in Judges 16:25–7," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128 (2009): 61.

[57] Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen*, 231.

[58] Webb, *Judges*, 400. Quite why Webb envisages Delilah as an "upmarket" prostitute is unclear.

[59] John B. Vickery, "In Strange Ways: The Story of Samson," in *Images of God and Man: Old Testament Short Stories in Literary Focus*, ed. Burke O. Long (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1981), 69; cited in Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen*, 231.

[60] Ackerman, "What If," 38–39; Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 51.

[61] J. Cheryl Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women* (second rev. ed.; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012), 229.

[62] Avaren Ipsen, *Sex Working and the Bible* (London: Equinox, 2009), 61–62.

[63] Bal, *Lethal Love*, 1.

CHAPTER 31

EXAMINING SCRIPTURE IN LIGHT OF TRANS WOMEN'S VOICES

KATY E. VALENTINE

WITHIN biblical scholarship, transgender voices are largely absent, especially those of trans women.[1] This essay engages the gifts of trans women's interpretive communities through an exploration of the phrase, "male and female," in Gen. 1:27. The choice for this verse emerges from trans women themselves, many of whom find resonance with Gen. 1:27 in light of their own spiritual and gender journeys. I show that the androgyne myths that circulated in the ancient world support trans women's interpretations of the first human as gender variant. Trans women disrupt binary gender expectations in positive ways and contribute new voices to feminist interpretations of the Hebrew Bible.

The essay follows three steps. First, it briefly defines various terms related to gender identity. This section also explores the ramifications of the gender binary system that pervades Western culture. It critiques the definition of womanhood that is tied directly to reproductive capacity. The second section, examines the phrase, "male and female," in Gen. 1:27. The section offers an interpretation history of this passage, showing why many trans women embrace it as significant for their gender journey. This section especially highlights the idea that the original human was androgynous. The third section explores the impact of the androgynous myth in Greek and New Testament literature. Finally, I conclude with some reflections on the development of a transgender hermeneutic.

This essay gives primacy to as many trans voices as possible to interpret Gen.

1:27.[2] Voices include both trans scholars and ordinary trans women of faith who interpret the Bible in light of their own lived experiences. Many trans women shared their interpretations in interviews, and this essay tries to do justice by them. Currently, few trans women scholars are writing in the field of biblical studies, something that will hopefully change in the near future.[3] Despite their paucity, transgender interpretations are robust within communities of faith and among select theological works. The essay provides historical-critical and philological resources to support the multivalent trans affirmative interpretations that have been offered previously.

Who Is a "Real" Woman, Anyway?

Three terms are helpful in a discussion of transgender women: gender binary, transgender, and gatekeeping. The first term, "gender binary," describes how humanity is often divided into the categories of male/female or masculine/feminine. These polarities are strongly associated with gender norms and expectations.[4] In the Western world, the male/female binary appears everywhere: driver's licenses, passports, airplane tickets, online surveys; the list is seemingly endless. Within this binary system, the link between an individual and their gender is related exclusively to biology. Simplistically, infant males (those with a penis) become men and infant females (those with a vagina) become women.[5] One example of a fault of the binary view is its failure to account for intersex individuals.[6] The increased visibility of gender identities outside of the binary system (transgender, genderqueer, agender, or gender expansive) shatter the illusion that biological sex equals gender.[7] Trans women are one group whose biological sex does not match gender identity.

The second term that needs to be defined, "transgender," describes a range of gender identities when someone's biological sex (male/female/intersex) does not correspond to the internal sense of gender. Thus, "trans women" are individuals whose sex assigned at birth is male or intersex but whose internal sense of gender is female, femme, or somewhere on the female/feminine spectrum. Since trans women such as Caitlyn Jenner, Laverne Cox, and Kate Bornstein have become household names in recent years, public awareness of transgender identity is higher now than it has been in the past. Yet, because identities are not stagnant, some might use the term "transgender" to describe themselves even though the term does not capture their full gender identity. Non-Western gender

identities may overlap with a Western understanding of transgender but operate in a different cultural system, such as Two-Spirit or hijra.[8] I do not address these identities specifically here, but I welcome points of comparison.

The third term, "gatekeeping," is a process that asks trans women to prove their identity repeatedly, with frustrating consequences. Gatekeeping asks trans women to verify their womanhood through a variety of means such as dress, hairstyle, or body shaping. Often, gatekeeping is a tactic for exclusion, especially regarding basic health care accessibility. One common motivation for dismissing trans women is tied to reproductive assumptions. As trans women cannot give birth, they are often not considered "real" women. Even a trans woman who has undergone vaginoplasty surgery, constructing a vagina, clitoris, and labia may not pass the invisible gatekeeping standards of womanhood. Childbearing is a common litmus test for femininity in general among trans and cis women. But the womanhood of a cis woman who has a hysterectomy is rarely questioned in the same way as that of a trans woman. Such gatekeeping has led to an uneasy, and sometimes openly hostile, relationship between trans women and feminism.[9] The presumption that trans women are not *real* women lingers in contemporary feminist thought, even though trans exclusionary radical feminism is no longer the norm. This essay avoids gatekeeping at all costs.

It is a disservice to women (trans and cis) to evaluate womanhood in terms of reproduction. Transgender studies prove that an inward sense of gender—variable across time and culture—is more reliable than biology to determine gender. Jay Prosser observes that it is very common for trans women to report a sense of gender difference from very early childhood.[10] Monica Joy Cross, an ordained trans woman pastor and activist, describes her experience: "Born and raised as a black male I found that my inner being was incongruent with living as a black man . . . . Coming out then in my life was about two things (1) sustainability and (2) authenticity."[11] Likewise, trans scholar Susan Stryker dissociates biological sex from gender identity when she explains:

> This takes us into one of the central issues of transgender politics—that the sex of the body does not bear any *necessary* or *deterministic* relationship to the social category in which that body lives. This assertion . . . is political precisely because it contradicts the common belief that whether a person is a man or a woman in the social sense is fundamentally determined by the sex of the body.[12]

In some ways, gatekeeping is an unconscious part of scholarship about gender in the Hebrew Bible. Given the emphasis in the Hebrew Bible itself on female reproduction, this is not surprising, although female characters do make

contributions beyond their status as mothers. Lisa W. Davison traces this biblical scholarship and comments: “[I]n our zeal to find an important role for women, we have been complicit in the patriarchal system of continuing to limit a woman’s worth to the biological role of motherhood.”[13] Some biblical women, such as Miriam, Esther, and Judith, appear in the context of neither motherhood nor barrenness. Others, like Deborah and Huldah, often have been assigned motherhood even when the biblical text does not discuss their maternality. Although Davison’s work does not address trans women specifically, this analysis is applicable since trans women who become mothers do not do so according to the gender binary script. Defining womanhood by biology or reproductive capacity is a destructive form of gatekeeping. Avoiding such a narrow definition becomes significant in the discussion of the phrase “male and female” in reference to the first human being as a non-procreating androgyne.

The Androgyne in the Book of Genesis

Many trans women see the possibility for a multivalent gender expression of the *ʿādām*, the first human being, in Gen. 1:27, as will be visible in the later discussion of trans women's interpretations. The qualifying clause, that *ʿādām* is created "male and female" raises a salient question: does the creation of the *ʿādām* consist of a single human being or two separate human beings? Does this passage describe an androgyne or a woman and man? Feminist scholars have largely presumed the latter possibility in their work. Their interpretation certainly has merit, as it counterbalances the crushing misogynistic interpretations that promote a male-first creation. Equally intriguing, however, is the idea that the *ʿādām* is in fact one single being. The word *ʿādām* is a singular, collective noun with the meaning of "humanity" in this context.[14] If the *ʿādām* is, in fact, one individual, then that being would be simultaneously male and female, and thus non-procreative. This interpretation is quite plausible given various androgyne myths that peppered the ancient world to which the Priestly source had wide exposure in the post-Exilic context.

Trans women are certainly not the first interpreters who identify the *ʿādām* as an androgyne. Modern scholarship has explored the androgyne myth to some extent, but the presumption of a gender binary undergirds most scholarship on Gen. 1:27—including feminist exegesis. In modern commentaries, the androgynous interpretation has both supporters and detractors,[15] but it is not uncommon for exegetes to omit any exploration of androgynous myths in the book of Genesis and elsewhere in the Bible.

Androgyne myths were popular in the ancient world, with many permutations in myth and ritual.[16] The Priestly source, written in the post-exilic era, was widely exposed to these myths in various forms. In 1909, Friedrich Schwally suggested that an androgyne myth might be the background of Gen. 1:27, but his scholarship was largely ignored.[17] An androgynous reading of Genesis was again picked up, in contemporary feminist biblical studies, by Phyllis Trible. In her 1973 work, and again in 1979, she proposed that the *ʿādām* of Genesis 2–3 is androgynous.[18] However, notably, Trible did not refer to the *ʿādām* of Gen. 1:27. Instead, she emphatically describes the *ʿādām* in Gen. 1:27 in terms of sexual differentiation,[19] stating that this verse represents two separate individuals.[20] Trible's general assessment, that Gen. 1:27 affirms gender equality, has proven

divisive. Her well-known interpretation has been promoted in some feminist commentaries but rejected in others.[21]

Trans theological works take up Trible's argument to some extent. One example, Virginia R. Mollenkott's *Omnigender*, has proven to be influential among trans Christians. Mollenkott directly cites Trible's interpretations and then hypothesizes that Gen. 1:27 is an androgynous myth. She briefly references early Jewish interpretations that describe the androgyne,[22] stating that the human being is "either hermaphroditic or sexually undifferentiated . . . closer to a transgender identity than to half of a binary gender construct."[23] Mollenkott presents interesting but largely unsupported similarities between the first human being and trans people today.[24]

Other interpreters dance around the possibility of an androgynous creation story in Genesis 1. They find the rich possibilities for gender variance in the story. For instance, Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn promote the idea that God does *not* differentiate the sexes. In particular, they note the grammatical oddities in Gen. 1:27 when they explain: "Significantly, the slippage extends from the God(s) to the human(s) created in his/their image. When humankind is one (him/it) it is also plural—male and female (them)."[25] The indeterminacy of a God whose identity is not sharply defined is also visible in a world that might be as "inherently indeterminable as the identity that creates it."[26] Fewell and Gunn do not explore the androgyne myth explicitly, but trans theologians have adopted their reading. For instance, Lewis Reay interprets the *ʻādām* as ungendered. He writes that, in the ungendered state, the *ʻādām* is full of "all of the gender diversity possible in God, full of all maleness and femaleness, and every other gender possibility besides."[27] Reay's interpretation thus recognizes the fullness of all genders in the *ʻādām* of Gen. 1:27.

Another Hebrew phrase, *zākār ûn^{e}qēvâ*, is important in trans women's readings of Gen. 1:27. This modifying phrase is rare in the Hebrew Bible, appearing a total of six times always in the book of Genesis (1:27, 5:2, 6:19, 7:3, 9, 16).[28] The words *zākār* (male) and *n^{e}qēvâ* (female) are both adjectives that are far less common than the more expected nouns *ish* (man) and *ishshāh* (woman). The phrase *zākār ûn^{e}qēvâ* in Gen. 1:27 and 5:2 are associated closely with the *ʻādām*.[29] If the *ʻādām* is, in fact, a singular androgyne, then the phrase *zākār ûn^{e}qēvâ* describes the potentiality of one person rather than two. As seen below, many trans women value the idea that the androgyne is one individual with a multiplicity of genders. This close proximity of *zākār ûn^{e}qēvâ* to the singular *ʻādām* strengthens the possibility that in the Priestly source the first human is

androgynous.[30]

An androgynous interpretation of Gen. 1:26–27 is strengthened by an examination of the Septuagint translation. It preserves both the specificity of the Hebrew vocabulary and its grammatical oddities. The Septuagint translates *ʻādām* as *anthrōpos*, which is also a collective noun denoting humanity;[31] it translates *zākār ûnᵉqēvâ* as *arsen kai thēly*. This choice is interesting since the adjectives *arsēn* and *thēlys* are much less common than the nouns *anēr* (man) and *gynē* (woman).[32] In this way, the Septuagint translators preserved the rarity of the phrase, *zākār ûnᵉqēvâ*. I argue that the choice of *arsen kai thēly* reflects an interest in the androgyne myths of the Hellenistic world.

Trans Women Speak on Gen. 1:27

Contemporary trans women interpreters often read the *ʻādām* as an androgynous human. I interviewed several trans women to understand how they approach Gen. 1:27.[33] Nancy, a pastoral candidate, sees the *ʻādām* in Gen. 1:27 as androgynous and dual-sexed. In her view, this androgynous human being possesses both male and female qualities and will only later separate into a male and a female body. Nancy uses the terms "intergendered" and "progendered" to describe the *ʻādām*. Along with many other trans women, she recognizes that the androgyne holds the complexities of all gender identities, not restricted to only "male" and "female." Nancy's interpretation thus coincides with Reay who also recognizes the fullness of all genders in the *ʻādām* of Gen. 1:27. The conjunction *vav* translated as "and" in the phrase *zākār ûnᵉqēvâ* is critical here for connecting the many genders contained in the *ʻādām*. The verse is powerful to Nancy because it acknowledges the male parts of her own identity that combine with her trans woman identity. Gen. 1:27 offers "comfort [because] there is 'male and female' because I am also 'male and female.'"

The idea that "male and female" holds a multiplicity of gender identities is an important refrain among trans women, especially in light of intersex awareness and advocacy. Many trans women are mis-assigned with a male identity at birth when they are, in fact, intersex. River regards the first human as an intersex being, who contains not only male and female but all the in-between-ness that encompasses those identities. In Gen. 1:27 Abigail finds the "fullness of the human experience where gender doesn't have to be wholly binary." These interpretations emerge from the lived experiences of trans women reconciling

male bodies with an inner, and eventually outward, feminine identity. Similarly, Tanesh considers the first human as a spiritual being that inhabits an androgynous body. The repeated refrain "and God saw that it was good" speaks deeply to Tanesh's own identity. The first human being, an androgyne, was good, and this androgyne creature has both male and female contained within the body, in a manner similar to many trans women. Tanesh comments: "If I am created and I am a human being reflecting God's nature, and I'm part of the 'them,'[34] I am 'male and female.'" Tanesh's interpretation focuses, first, on the spirit and, second, on the corporeal form, shifting the conversation away from the limits of biological sex and toward the gifts of gender identity and expression.

Monica Joy Cross speaks to the idea of holding these multiplicities of gender in her own life story as a black trans woman in the United States. Her comments are not in the context of a discussion of Gen. 1:27, but they are applicable to the idea that one body holds the divine feminine and masculine. Cross comments that "the divine black transgender feminine, i.e. Monica Joy, which emerges as the divine black transgender feminine and the sacred black masculine, i.e. Alexander, considered a social and cultural production of the black experience in the United States, [and] is interpreted as equitable identities embodied within the human body."[35] Cross briefly addresses Gen. 1:27–31, recognizing how the passage has been interpreted exploitatively. In contrast, she suggests that discarding binary interpretations gives gender fluid persons potentiality to align with Mother Earth,[36] which has rich implications for reading the Priestly creation story.

It is clear that trans women have varied and creative insights regarding Gen. 1:27. Their interpretations view the first human as androgynous, implying that procreation is not an initial element of the androgyne. The demand that many trans women face of proving to be "woman enough" diminishes because of the powerful image of the androgyne, as it contains a multiplicity of genders. Of course, not every trans woman sees her story in Gen. 1:27. Melanie is hesitant about the value of Gen. 1:27 for her own gender journey, preferring instead to look to the story of Eve as the first trans woman.[37] Melanie looks to the historical context of biblical stories, supposing that transgender people existed at the time of the story's construction; possibly it influenced the writing.[38] Several other trans women interviewed did not mention Gen. 1:27 as a critical text for their journey or they did not have a strong response to the pericope.

The Androgyne in the New Testament

Some references to the androgyne myth also appear in Greco-Roman and New Testament literature. The phrase *arsen kai thēly* appears numerous times in the Septuagint and appears to reflect an interest in the androgyne myths of the Hellenistic world. Likewise, Paul reconceptualizes the androgyne myth in early Christian communities.

As seen above, the Septuagint translation strengthens the possibility of an androgynous interpretation of Gen. 1:26–27. This interpretation is bolstered by an examination of selective Greek writers. For instance, Plato describes the androgynous myth when he refers to Aristophanes speaking about the original nature of human beings as having *three* sexes: male and female (*arsen kai thēly*), plus *androgynos*.[39] The latter consists of both male and female. Notably, the phrase, *arsen kai thēly*, is identical to Gen. 1:27. In this reading, all three sexes had eight limbs, two faces, and round bodies; they are two bodies facing each other with sexual organs on the backs of the bodies. The male sex was made of two male bodies; the female sex of two female bodies; the androgynous sex of a male and a female body. Zeus split each human being in two, effectively creating only a male and female sex. The halves of the original bodies yearned for each other and would embrace upon finding each other, leading to hunger and death. Zeus then shifted the reproductive organs of humans to the front of their bodies so that when a male and female embraced, they might reproduce. The descendants of the androgynous sex are heterosexual men and women, whereas the descendants of the male and female sexes are homosexual men and women, respectively.[40]

This androgynous reading can be contrasted with Philo's *On the Contemplative Life*. In this work Philo emphatically denies that Jews subscribe to the myth that one person may consist of two bodies that are joined together and later separated.[41] His denouncement occurs in an extended conversation about the inappropriate passions of Greek symposia, and Philo refers to Plato's account of the symposium at the house of Agathon.[42] Philo is at pains to undermine inappropriate Greek passions when he tells the story of the androgyne myth and dismisses it in favor of restraint and monogamy.[43] In his retelling, Philo associates the pagan androgyne myth with immoral passions and intemperance.

Another, weaker case for an allusion to the androgyne myth is visible in *On the Creation of the World*.[44] Here, Philo does not use the word *androgynos*, but discusses how the first man and woman united into "one body" (*henos zōou*).[45]

This body may refer to copulation, but it also could be an oblique reference to androgynous myths. As soon as he alludes to the myth, Philo maligns it by reporting that this one body feels pleasure (*hēdonē*) and then transgresses. In other words, the pagan androgynous myth leads to human failing. Philo never directly connects Gen. 1:27 with the androgynous myths. In fact, when Philo quotes Gen. 1:27 in *Who Is the Heir?*, he defends the viewpoint that the two sexes, *arsen kai thēly*, were created separately.[46] Philo's stance that male and female are created separately, upon first glance, seemingly rejects the androgyne interpretation. However, his repeated and explicit denouncement against an androgynous myth makes it likely that some Jews *did* subscribe to this reading of Gen. 1:27 in the context of Judaism.

Berossous, writing between Plato and Philo, also provides an account of the androgynous myth that uses the phrase *arsen kai thēly*.[47] He tells of a cosmogony situated in Mesopotamian culture which includes, among a number of fantastical creatures, androgynous beings with four wings, two faces, one body, two heads,[48] and two sets of genitalia, described as *arsen kai thēly*.[49] The double set of male and female genitalia bears resemblance to Plato's account. However, in this case the androgynous creature is not a progenitor of humans. Russell Gmirkin suggests a direct relationship between Berossus's work and Genesis 1–11. Although he does not specifically explore Gen. 1:27, the phraseology shared by Genesis, Plato, and Berossus strengthens Gmirkin's argument.[50]

The use of the phrase *arsen kai thēly* in these ancient sources points to at least some level of dependence. Certainly gender was a category utilized often in ancient polemic, so it is conceivable that the repeated use of this phrase may be coincidental. But the lack of additional references to *arsen kai thēly* in other Greek texts makes this phrase unique.[51] It appears mostly in the Septuagint and later Christian sources in reference to Gen. 1:27.[52] Given that all three sources share identical phrasing of vocabulary, it is likely that the Septuagint account of Gen. 1:27 depends directly on Plato or Berossous or both. The translators of the Septuagint in the second century BCE undoubtedly were familiar with both of these writings, as well as other renditions of androgynous myths. The life of the phrase takes on new meaning in the New Testament, particularly in the baptismal formula.

In short, Gen. 1:27 was important in the world of early Christianity, and early Christian literature quotes the phrase *arsen kai thēly* five times.[53] Yet only Paul's use of the quote, embedded in the baptismal formula in Gal. 3:28, echoes the

androgyne myth from Gen. 1:27. The baptismal formula is likely pre-Pauline, and Paul uses it to encourage unity to a fractious Galatian church: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male and female.” Two of the pairings—Jew/Greek and slave/free—use the conjunction *oude*, but the pairing male/female uses the conjunction *kai*.[54] This difference makes it likely that the phrase *arsen kai thēly* is indeed a direct quote of Gen. 1:27 and not merely coincidental.[55] When Paul quotes the baptismal formula in 1 Cor. 12:13, the male/female pairing is absent.[56]

Although Paul is undoubtedly familiar with various androgyne myths, he does not engage them directly in his quotation of the baptismal formula. Instead, he emphasizes to the Galatians that their primary identity is defined by Christ and not by ethnicity, social status, or gender. These social statuses may not have ceased to exist outside of the church, but an argument can be made for a radical early Christian movement that sought to dissolve these binaries.[57] Regardless of whether Paul intended to reference, even obliquely, the androgyne myths, it is highly likely that the Galatians and other early Gentile Christians *heard* the baptismal formula in light of them. The faint strains of the pagan androgyne myths in the baptismal formula could help ease the anxiety of new Christians who abandoned their former pagan practices.[58] They heard the familiar mythic theme in Gal. 3:28, now attributed to Genesis.

Trans Women Speak on Gal. 3:28

Many trans women resonate with the reference to the androgyne myth in Gal. 3:28, but for very different reasons than Gen. 1:27. Whereas Gen. 1:27 speaks of male and female in one androgyne body, Gal. 3:28 brings awareness to the *lack* of gender distinction within identity in Christ. Tanesh brings her interpretation of Gen. 1:27 full circle in her discussion of Gal. 3:28. She affirms her trans woman identity, and the phrase “no male and female” resonates deeply with Tanesh. She notes that in the future gender identity will not exist because all are one in Christ. This conviction empowers her to live as a trans woman *now*. For Nancy, the assurance in the baptismal formula that gender identity, including transgender identity, is not a barrier to being in Christ is incredibly liberating. The verse enables her to see herself as having the same rights in the church as anyone else. Gerri also embraces the verse as an affirmation that everyone has multiple facets to themselves that exist simultaneously in one body; just as one

may be an engineer, a deacon, a parent, or a scout leader all at the same time, others also have masculine and feminine qualities.

In contrast, Maria did not find Gen. 1:27 helpful in relationship to her gender identity. She finds the verse of Gal. 3:28 more important, keeping the verse on a notepad near her computer. For her, this verse operates as a rebuttal to people who question her gender identity by means of gatekeeping or with the maxim that "God doesn't make mistakes." Citing the "no male and female" in Gal. 3:28 offers a buffer to this type of popular theology that supports binary gender roles with a clear biblical injunction to disregard such binaries. Abigail likewise confirms that Gal. 3:28 gives her a sense that the arbitrary nature of gender roles becomes eradicated. She does not necessarily see gender being *erased* in Gal 3:28. Instead, the passage does not *emphasize* gender or gender roles. River interprets this verse in light of gender justice. One day God will eliminate kyriarchical structures. As someone who rejects the gender binary wholly, River sees her identity as resting fully in her knowledge that she is a child of God. In some ways, Gal. 3:28 has the potential to exclude non-binary persons since the only identities named are "male" and "female," but the verse is still powerful enough to resonate strongly with the hope for a radically just future.

Thoughts on a Transgender Hermeneutic

The creative, thoughtful interpretations shared by the trans women above make it clear: the time to develop a transgender hermeneutic is here. This essay offers an interpretation that shows the particular insights of trans women about the androgyne interpretation of Gen. 1:27 and Gal. 3:28. Without their insights, my attention would not have been turned to this particular direction. One particular gift that trans women's voices offer is the ability to see gender ambiguity and variance in places that many cisgender readers might miss. Melanie, who did not have a strong affinity with Gen. 1:27, comments in this regard: "Being trans in some ways makes me feel more connected to the verse because I'm not one or the other, I'm a combination of both . . . . Being trans is being a part of both and sharing more of God than simply being one or the other. While it doesn't make us more spiritual or better than anyone else, it does make us unique and I rather like that."

Trans women in particular have gendered experiences that are valuable for consideration in biblical interpretation, especially feminist and woman-centered interpretations. One particular experience of trans women is the ability to see

from the perspective of male privilege *and* the societal limitations that women experience. Trans women also live with unique danger. Being an out trans woman means putting one's self at risk each day, especially for trans women who have features that are phenotypically male. This danger increases dramatically for trans women of color.[59] Trans women have particular perspectives on the intersections of gender, gender identity, race, and violence and privilege, which this essay addresses only briefly. I am hopeful to see such experiences incorporated into the breadth of feminist biblical scholarship in forthcoming years. This expansion will happen only with greater inclusion of trans voices, bringing up trans scholars within the particular field of biblical interpretation and by listening deeply to trans interpretive communities.

Both the androgyne of Gen. 1:27 and the baptismal formula of Gal. 3:28 shine brightly for trans women. They know intimately the experience of being both "male and female" and the shifting privilege of transition from male to female. Within trans women's personal lives, both of these verses have the power to counteract the gatekeeping that seeks to keep trans women from living fully as women. These verses are significant because ancient sources are more likely to affirm transitions from female to male but not male to female, clearly rooted in patriarchy.[60] Gen. 1:27 and Gal. 3:28 do not ask trans women to deny the masculine parts of themselves. Instead these verses encourage trans women to embrace and love all of the gendered elements that make them who they are as part of the image of God.

This essay adds to the insights of trans women's interpretations of Gen. 1:27 with socio-historical and philological analyses. Of course, I do not suggest that trans women need me to do so; their interpretations are valid and complete by themselves. This work serves, I hope, to bolster multivalent interpretations and to give additional support to trans women by paying attention to various contexts in the ancient world. The trajectory of the androgyne myth has roots in ancient myth and ritual, becomes expressed in Gen. 1:27, and then is transformed in the Septuagint and Pauline corpus. It gives strength to trans women today. The list does not stop here. The androgyne myth also informs early Christianity, especially in its Gnostic strands, and in early Judaism.[61] The power of androgyne myths continues in today's interpretations by trans women. In the future of intersectional feminist biblical interpretation, trans women's voices will lead the way.

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[1] From this point forward, I use the term "trans women," a commonly accepted and friendly short form of "transgender woman."

[2] A helpful starting place is Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle, eds., *The Transgender Studies Reader* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006); Susan Stryker and Aren Z. Aizura, eds., *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013).

[3] I should note upfront that I am cisgender, i.e. my gender identity (woman) aligns with the sex assigned to me at birth (female). This difference poses particular dangers, especially given the pathologizing of transgender individuals by cisgender professionals. See Julia Serano, *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2007). Several factors are at work in biblical scholarship, including a presumption of a binary gender system plus the queer emphasis on sexual orientation and homoeroticism. Monica Joy Cross comments on the state of the academy in terms of gender identity and race: "My experience as an intellectual and activist for the liberation of gender has made me cognizant of the lack of black transgender intellectuals in this pursuit. Academic conferences such as the American Academy of Religion (AAR) or the Transgender Religious Leaders Summit (TRLS), or the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) have been [sic] rigorous and lonely endeavors," in Monica Joy Cross, *Authenticity and Imagination in the Face of Oppression* (Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2016), 37.

[4] Paul Baker, *Sexed Texts: Language, Gender and Sexuality* (London: Equinox, 2008), esp. 1–23.

[5] Reproductive systems obviously include other external and internal organs, but penises and vaginas are the most obvious and seemingly "fixed" expressions of gender identity within the binary gender system.

[6] Intersex individuals have both male and female reproductive organs; the older term "hermaphrodite" is no longer preferred.

[7] "Genderqueer" is a broad term that describes usually non-binary individuals who do not identify exclusively as masculine or feminine. "Agender" is a term embraced by individuals who do not claim any gender, regardless of external or internal genitalia. "Gender expansive" (similar to "gender creative" and "gender non-conforming") is a term that describes individuals who identify with a multiplicity of gender identities at once; they include masculine or feminine but are rarely limited to them. The terms described here participate in non-binary gender frameworks.

[8] Two-Spirit is a term that describes a Native American gender identity in many, although not all, tribes. This term replaces *berdache*. "Two-Spirit" is, of course, an English term and each tribe has its own vocabulary and understanding of how masculinity and femininity come together. Hijra is a male-born individual in India who lives as a woman, and the Indian government legally classified hijra as a third gender in 2014.

[9] Most famously in Janice G. Raymond, *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1979). See the discussion on transgender identity and theological feminism in Susannah Cornwall, "Recognizing the Full Spectrum of Gender? Transgender, Intersex and the Futures of Feminist Theology," *Feminist Theology* 20.3 (2012): 246–41. See also Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle, "Where Did We Go Wrong? Feminism and Trans Theory—Two Teams on the Same Side?," in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, ed. Susan Stryker (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 196; Teresa J. Hornsby and Deryn Guest, *Transgender, Intersex, and Biblical Interpretation* (Semeia Studies 83; Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2016), 6–7.

[10] See the accounts in Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality*, Gender and Culture (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1998), 75, 128–29, 140, 147, 149.

[11] Cross, *Authenticity and Imagination in the Face of Oppression*, ix.

[12] Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2008), 11.

[13] Lisa W. Davison, "Barren or Childless: Is There a Difference? Childless Women in the Hebrew Bible as Special Agents of God," unpublished paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the SBL, New Orleans, November 23, 2009. Davison's work appears in the forthcoming book, entitled *More Than a Wom(b)an: Childfree Women in the Hebrew Bible*, to be published by Wipf & Stock.

[14] The BDB identifies *ʿādām* as a collective noun inclusive of men and women in Gen. 1:27. Some maintain that *ʿādām* refers to men only; see, e.g., James Barr, "One Man, or All Humanity? A Question in the Anthropology of Genesis 1," in *Recycling Biblical Figures: Papers Read at a NOSTER Colloquium in Amsterdam, 12–13 May, 1997*, ed. Athalaya Brenner and Jan Willem van Henten (Leiden: Deo, 1999), 3–21. See the decisive rebuttal in the same volume by Johannes C. Moor, "The First Human Being a Male? A Response to Professor Barr," 23.

[15] See the helpful review and notes in Susan A. Brayford, *Genesis* (Septuagint Commentary Series; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 223–24.

[16] Wayne A. Meeks, "The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity," *History of Religions* 13.3 (1974): 165–208; Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Trans-Scribing Sexual Politics: Images of the Androgyne in Discourses of Antique Religion," in *Descrizioni E Iscrizioni: Politiche Del Discorso*, ed. Carla Locatelli and Giovanni Covi (Labirtini 32; Trento: Dipartimento di Scienze Filologiche e Storiche, 1998), 1–32.

[17] Friedrich Schwally, "Die Biblischen Schöpfungsberichte," *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 9 (1909): 159–75. His work was brought to my attention by Johannes C. Moor, "The Duality in God and Man: Gen 1:26–27 as P's Interpretation of the Yahwistic Creation Account," in *Intertextuality in Ugarit and Israel*, ed. Johannes C. de Moor (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 119–21.

[18] Phyllis Trible, "Eve and Adam: Genesis 2–3 Reread," *Andover Newton Quarterly* 13.4 (1973): 251–

58. See her refinement in *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1978), 141 n. 17.

[19] Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 15. Trible also emphasizes that the plural form in the parallel lines of Gen. 1:27 ("he created *them*") solidifies the distinction of the sexes; see 17–18.

[20] Ibid., 18.

[21] Interpretations sympathetic to Gen. 1:27 as a gender equal presentation exist as early as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman's Bible* (Seattle, WA: Coalition Task Force on Women and Religion, 1974), 15, first published in 1898. See also the interpretations by Phyllis Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 41.1 (1973): 30–48 and Susan Niditch, "Genesis," in *Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (exp. ed., Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 16. Other feminist interpreters regard Gen. 1:27 as adhering to patriarchal antiquity. For instance, Phyllis Bird articulates a view of male/female as related specifically to fertility and procreation; see Phyllis A Bird, "'Male and Female He Created Them': Gen 1:27b in the Context of the Priestly Account of Creation," *The Harvard Theological Review* 74.2 (1981): 129–59; see also Athalya Brenner, *The Intercourse of Knowledge: On Gendering Desire and "Sexuality" in the Hebrew Bible* (Biblical Interpretation 26; Leiden / New York, NY: Brill, 1996), 11–13.

[22] Virginia R. Mollenkott, *Omnigender: A Trans-Religious Approach* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2001), 90 n. 7. Mollenkott cites Zohar 34b.30–33.

[23] Ibid., 91.

[24] Likewise, in *Trans-Gender* Justin Tanis affirms that the first human being in Gen. 1:26–28 is "without gender differentiation, encompassing both female and male." However, Tanis does not mention Trible; see Justin Tanis, *Trans-Gender: Theology, Ministry, and Communities of Faith* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018), first published in 2003, 58.

[25] David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1992), 23.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Lewis Reay, "Towards a Transgender Theology: Que(e)rying the Eunuchs," in *Trans/Formations*, ed. Marcella Althaus-Reid and Lisa Isherwood (Controversies in Contextual Theology Series; London: SCM Press, 2009), 162.

[28] Each word appears on its own in the MT; *zākār*, 82 times; *nəqēbah*, 22 times. In contrast, *ish* (man) occurs 2,186 times; *ishshāh* (woman), 781 times.

[29] The other four references occur in the story of Noah. The Noahic references, describing male and female animals that will repopulate the earth, are very different than the references in Gen. 1:27 and 5:2.

[30] One possible objection to an androgynous interpretation is the command to repopulate the earth in Gen. 1:28. Aušra Pazeraite argues persuasively that the phrase "male and female" may be associated with reproduction and fertility. The root *zkhr* means "to remember" or "to commemorate"; the root *nqb* means "to pierce" or "to bore." Pazeraite theorizes that the ritual role of the male is to remember by passing on his seed while the role of the female is not only to be pierced by the phallus but also to bear children. An androgynous interpretation of Gen. 1:26–28, however, is not in opposition to the command to procreate. After all, an androgyne cannot procreate alone, and in the case of Gen. 1:27, no other humans exist yet. The trans women cited above do not object to procreation, and many have children themselves, but they do object to limiting womanhood to childbearing. Many androgyne myths depict an eventual separation of the androgyne, at which time procreation can occur, and humanity can fulfill the obligation to populate the earth.

[31] Although *anthrōpos* often has androcentric overtones; see the discussion in Helen Schüngel-Straumann, "On the Creation of Man and Woman in Genesis 1–3: The History and Reception of Texts Reconsidered," in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis, The Feminist Companion to the Bible*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 61.

[32] The word *arsēn* occurs fifty-three times in the Septuagint, and the word *thēlys* occurs nineteen times in the Septuagint.

[33] I am deeply grateful to the women who shared their stories with me. The nature of this work means that many interviews are done over the phone, and I do not always have demographic information for each person interviewed. Some women wanted their full names listed; others are listed by a pseudonym. Racial/ethnic backgrounds are moderately diverse. Pseudonyms are marked with an asterisk (*); otherwise the women interviewed gave permission for their full names to be used. Nancy Wichmann, pastoral candidate, transgender; Abigail Hester, activist (http://transgrrrlabby.com/); Tanesh Nutall; Melanie*; Gerri Canon; River Needham, clergy candidate; Maria. Other sources are cited in the footnotes.

[34] In Hebrew: *ōtam* (Gen. 1:27).

[35] Cross, *Authenticity and Imagination in the Face of Oppression*, 2–3.

[36] Ibid., 69.

[37] The popularity of Eve as the first trans woman cited widely in trans theology, an interesting proposal but with flaws. See Edward L. Kessel, "A Proposed Biological Interpretation of The Virgin Birth," *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 35.3 (1983): 129–36; Virginia R. Mollenkott, *Omnigender: A Trans-Religious Approach* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2001), 104–7. See the critique in Tanis, *Trans-Gender*, 139.

[38] Similarly, Guest argues against the use of Gen. 1:26–28 as *the* foundational text for transgender hermeneutics in Guest, *Transgender*, 38.

[39] Plato, *Symp.* 189C–193D.

[40] Plato, Symp. 189E.

[41] Philo, *Contempl. Life*, 63. See the discussion in John R. Levison, *Portraits of Adam in Early Judaism: From Sirach to 2 Baruch* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1988), 75–76.

[42] Philo calls attention to Plato before he dismisses the androgyne myth. Plato describes the androgynous myth in *Symp.* 189C–193D (ca. 380 BCE). Aristophanes speaks about the original nature of human beings as having *three* sexes: male and female (*arsen kai thēly*), plus *androgynos* consisting of both male and female. I draw attention to the fact that the phrase, *arsen kai thēly*, is identical to Gen. 1:27. Originally, all three sexes had eight limbs, two faces, and round bodies; they are two bodies facing each other with sexual organs on the backs of the bodies. The male sex was made of two male bodies; the female sex of two female bodies; the androgynous sex of a male and a female body. Both Plato and Philo, separated by nearly four hundred years, testify to the popularity of a myth in which humanity's origins may be explained by a human with a body that is both male and female.

[43] Meeks, "The Image of the Androgyne," 186.

[44] Philo, *Creation*, 152. See Levison, *Portraits of Adam in Early Judaism*, 75–76.

[45] Whenever Philo does use the word *androgynous*, it is usually derogatory and refers to effeminate men and occasionally to masculine women; see *Sacrifices* 100, *Heir* 274, *Dreams* 1.126, *Spec. Laws* 3.38, 40, *Virtues* 21, *Contempl. Life* 60. See also Philo's term *gynandros* used in *Sacrifices* 100, *Heir* 274, and *Virtues* 21; Liddell-Scott-Jones gives only two examples other than Philo (Sophocles, *Fr.* 963 = *Ichn.* 963 and Aelianus, *Fr.* 10, 290) in *A Greek-English Lexicon* (ninth ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1996).

[46] Philo, *Heir* 163.

[47] Berossous, *Babyloniaca* (281 BCE).

[48] One male and one female but *andreian te kai gynaikeian* rather than *arsen kai thēly*.

[49] See the edited Greek edition in Felix Jacoby, ed., *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* (Leiden: 1954–64), 680 F1b.

[50] Russell Gmirkin, *Berossus and Genesis, Manetho and Exodus: Hellenistic Histories and the Date of the Pentateuch* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 89–139.

[51] Pseudo-Aristotle also uses the phrase (or comparable other Attic forms) seven times in [*Physiogn.*] 809a, 814a, 817a. With the exception of the reference in 814a, he speaks of animal and plants, not of people. In 814a, Aristotle discusses males who are disproportionate, likening them to females, and then distinguishes between the "male and female" in sexist terms.

[52] Gen. 1:27, 5:2, 6:19, 20, 7:2, 3, 8, 16; Matt. 19:4; Mark 10:6; Gal. 3:28; 1 Clem. 33:5; 2 Clem. 14:2.

[53] See n. 52.

[54] Meeks, "The Image of the Androgyne," 188 n. 77.

[55] Although this issue has been highly debated. See the history of scholarship regarding this topic in Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Gender Refusers in the Early Christian Mission: Gal. 3:28 as an Interpretation of Gen. 1:27b," in *Reading in Christian Communities: Essays on Interpretation in the Early Church*, ed. Charles A. Bobertz and David Brakke (Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity Series 14; Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 150–52.

[56] This is most likely so because the Corinthians struggled with gender issues; see, e.g., 1 Cor. 7:2–5; 11:2–15.

[57] I explore Gal. 3:28 in more detail in *For You Were Bought with a Price: Sex, Slavery, and Self-Control in a Pauline Community* (Dissertation Series 4; Wilmore: GlossaHouse, 2017), esp. 142–45, 357 n. 117.

[58] For an interpretation of this verse in light of androgyny, see Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1979), 196–99.

[59] For yearly statistics, contact the International Trans Day of Remembrance (https://tdor.info/), Human Rights Campaign (http://www.hrc.org/), or your local LGBTQI+ community center.

[60] See, e.g., Gos. Thom. 114.

[61] Regrettably, space precludes further investigation of these gender expressions. See the Bibliography for additional sources.

CHAPTER 32

THE PURPOSE, PRINCIPLES, AND GOALS OF EGALITARIAN BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

KAREN STRAND WINSLOW

BIBLICAL egalitarians are contemporary Christians who assume that women and men are equal. They believe that women should not be restricted from any church office, role, or responsibility because of their gender. Egalitarians read the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament to promote equality of opportunity for women and men; they disregard any hierarchical or "complementary" definitions of gender roles. Hence, to them, liberating themes are pervasive in the Bible. They also seek to influence evangelical Christian communities to regard the Bible as redemptive for women not only theologically but also ecclesiastically and socially. Egalitarian exegesis has the potential to influence those congregations within the larger Protestant Church that still restrict women from serving as priests, preachers, teachers, pastors, elders, deacons, and board members. These churches still interpret the Bible to legislate against women preaching to mixed congregations and teaching men. Often these churches permit women to teach and to lead women and children, including boys under the age of 15, but they do not permit women to pastor men. These prohibitions include the areas of counseling and spiritual direction to couples.

If egalitarian biblical exegesis convinced these congregations that the Bible represents women as equal partners to men and that it assumes their giftedness, then far more women could serve as pastors in large and small churches. More

clergywomen would then bring their experiences as women to the pulpit, lectern, counseling offices, ecclesial boards, and congregational communities. Their expertise as biblical interpreters would then become available to people who have only listened to men exposing the Bible and who have relied only on male translators and male commentators of the Bible. Such a change would alleviate the discrimination of women across the Christian evangelical world and promote gender equality wherever such churches have influence.

The male-dominated church has overlooked or misconstrued an entire range of human issues. The exclusion of women from shared ecclesial authority influenced the male-dominated church's refusal to attend to domestic violence, sexual harassment and assault, workplace inequities, and child abuse. Egalitarians maintain that women, interpreting the Bible from pulpits and other pastoral venues, would have moved politics and society toward respect, justice, and equality for women, children, and other marginalized people. Nonetheless, egalitarians do not claim that women are more righteous or moral than men, but they assert that ordained and respected female preachers and pastors would base their leadership on their experiences as women. They would have exposed and remedied social ills that male church leaders have ignored and covered up. These social ills would have been far less pervasive if gender equality would have been established and maintained throughout Christian history.

This essay has three sections. A first section discusses the history, contexts, and goals of egalitarians. The section also compares egalitarians to their opponents, the complementarians, and to feminists who are not egalitarian. A second section presents five principles of the egalitarian biblical hermeneutics. A third section examines the egalitarian influence on evangelical churches. The conclusion suggests how egalitarians and other feminists could collaborate, especially as feminist biblical scholars, in opposition to the renewed energy among complementarian Christians to secure and further implement gender hierarchies in evangelical congregations and homes.

A Description of the Egalitarian History, Contexts, and Goals in Comparison to Complementarians and Other Feminists

When "Evangelicals for Social Action and the Evangelical Woman's Caucus" (EWC) used the term "egalitarian" in the early 1970s to distinguish between

themselves and other feminists, they created a term that plays an important terminological role today.[1] The significance of this term is not diminished by the fact that current leaders of the "Christians for Biblical Equality International" (CBEI) prefer the phrase "Christian Feminist" to egalitarian when they align themselves with other feminists in support of equality for women in church and society.[2] Emerging out of ESC during the past few decades, CBEI is a central organization for egalitarians. It provides publications, conferences, and website discussion boards, as it affirms in its mission statement:

> CBE exists to promote biblical justice and community by educating Christians that the Bible calls women and men to share authority equally in service and leadership in the home, church, and world.[3]

Like other feminists, egalitarians recognize the equality and full humanity of women. They claim women's experiences as the starting point for their biblical exegesis, Christian theological discourse, and Christian practice. To egalitarians, women's experiences, including women's encounters with patriarchal structures and institutions, are the lens with which to interpret the Bible. Women's experiences with the Bible affirm why the Bible must be kept as a source for egalitarian faith and practice. Egalitarians thus agree with other feminists that patriarchy is the cause for women's abuse worldwide, and they support feminism's concern for women's global equality. Egalitarians, however, focus on the status of women in evangelical churches, because they know that "patriarchy in a religious environment, just as in any environment, has a negative effect on the whole community and creates a cultural climate more susceptible to abuse than one characterized by mutuality and shared leadership between men and women."[4]

Despite this common concern, some egalitarians are only beginning to share the tasks of other feminists who put pressure on politicians to change the structures of society toward more equality. For instance, the egalitarian writer, Kate Wallace Nunneley, who is a founder of the *Junia Project*, distinguishes between feminism and egalitarianism. She argues that both are necessary but different when she states:

> *Feminism* is "the advocacy of women's rights on the grounds of political, social, and economic equality to men." Considering the gender imbalance in governance, the stats on gender based violence, the gender wage gap, and the fact that until the rise of feminism around the world women were not considered full human beings by their governments, the need for feminism in the world is not hard to recognize. *Egalitarianism* is a theological standpoint that the Bible, when translated and interpreted correctly, teaches the full equality of men and women.[5]

In other words, to Wallace Nunneley feminism is a secular social movement whereas egalitarianism is more narrowly concerned with Christian theological demands for women's equality in the church. The primary egalitarian purpose is to live out what egalitarians identify as the biblical message of gender equality. They educate members of the evangelical tradition about gender equality for the betterment of the church "so that the church can be a more equitable place for men and women, and more accurately reflect the image of God to the world."[6] They also recognize the diversity among women and between individuals, as they claim that a person's gender should not be the reason for exclusion from any ecclesial position, roles, or task. Instead, one's church position, role, or task must emerge from the gift and the calling of an individual. Egalitarians stress that the Bible supports the egalitarian viewpoint, and so reading the Bible to promote patriarchy is unreasonable. Other egalitarians, however, as indicated by their online presence, attend to broader social concerns and consider the Christian church to be a reflection of God's female-male image within the Lord. Many egalitarians are increasingly concerned with global and cultural issues. They believe the church must address them and model the equality grounded in the biblical meta-narrative.

Although differences remain between feminists broadly defined and Christian egalitarians, the egalitarian position stands in sharp contrast to the complementarian stance. Over and over again, egalitarians have addressed those contrasts because egalitarians educate and support women in complementarian churches. Among those churches are many mega-churches. Egalitarians have always fought against the complementarians, their counterpart in the evangelical tradition. Complementarians are so-called traditionalists. They oppose egalitarians and evangelical feminists forcefully. Complementarians chose their name because of their conviction that gender must be understood in "gender complementary" ways. Complementarians affirm limiting women's roles in the church and in the home according to patriarchal views.[7] Complementarian leaders insist on separate roles for men and women. They defend this position with essentialist notions about gender that they locate in the Bible. Accordingly, complementarians interpret the respective biblical passages in sharp contrast to egalitarian interpretations. They assert that God is male and Christianity should have a masculine feel.[8] They subscribe to the benevolence of patriarchy as it enforces hierarchy and restricts women from leadership roles. The complementarian position also derives from the complementarian attachment to traditions and conventions that give power to men.[9] Both egalitarians and complementarians claim their intrinsic connection to historic evangelicalism.

Both of them value the Bible, affirm biblical authority, and consider the Bible as continuously relevant if interpreted properly.[10] Their theological kinship has led to energized encounters in publications, public debates, and digital media outlet.

The difference between egalitarians and complementarians could not be sharper. However, the difference between egalitarians and other feminists is also considerable.[11] The difference is most obvious in the egalitarian attempt to exonerate the Bible of patriarchy and sexism. Many non-egalitarian feminists maintain that the Bible establishes and promotes patriarchy in religion and society. These feminist scholars assert that the Bible's primary agenda is the affirmation of women's religious and political subordination. For instance, Esther Fuchs argues that the Bible aims "to universalize and legitimatize its male-centered epistemology," and thus, in her view, "[t]he Bible is implicated in perpetuating a doctrine of unequal power relations between men and women as it interprets culture prescriptively."[12] Egalitarians reject this position as they seek to mitigate the use of the Bible as a patriarchal tool. They retain the Bible as a meaningful means of divine grace for women. They also affirm that reason and experience are reliable tools of exegesis, especially women's experiences, as they engage the intersection of power and language in the construction of "woman."[13] The next section presents how egalitarian biblical interpretations resist biblical patriarchy by emphasizing biblical themes of liberation and equality.

A Discussion of Five Egalitarian Hermeneutical Principles

The egalitarian approach to the Bible affirms that Scripture does not use gender to categorize, rank, regulate, or limit the contributions and obligations of people, including women. The egalitarian position derives from close and general readings of biblical texts, as well as from the egalitarian conviction that the Bible builds faith in and knowledge about God. This stance enhances the egalitarian desire to read the Christian canon of the Bible as redemptive, instructive, and authoritative for women who are equal participants among all people of faith. While egalitarians acknowledge that patriarchy and ethnocentrism are embedded in biblical texts and cultures that produced, preserved, and authorized the Bible, egalitarians interpret biblical texts to question, challenge, or subvert patriarchy.

Recognizing that all biblical texts are grounded in their contexts, egalitarians

insist that biblical texts do not primarily authorize social conventions and cultural values of antiquity.[14] Rather, biblical writers wanted to build faith in Israel's God, whom they understood to be the source of life and hope for all people. They argued that "legitimizing women's equal inclusion in biblical retellings" contributes to "the transformation of society toward gender justice."[15] Said differently, egalitarians do not discard the Bible even though they realize that it reasserts the category of "woman," affirms the gender binary, or articulates the interests of its androcentric authors. Nevertheless, egalitarians deplore the fact that the Bible has been deployed to prescribe patriarchy and to devalue women of later generations. They repudiate the notion that the Bible can be used to grant men more authority, privileges, and obligations than to women. They reject the idea that the production of the Bible during patriarchal times means that today's readers have to accept this context as the status quo for today.

For this reason, egalitarians have much more in common with early second-wave Christian feminist theologians than current secular feminist Bible scholars. Early second-wave Christian feminist exegetes are often classified as revisionist, reformist, or reconstructionist Bible readers because of their positive evaluation of women's roles in biblical stories.[16] They pioneered the interpretation of biblical narratives in women-friendly ways since the early 1970s, but even today egalitarian interpreters highlight biblical women as saviors, prophets, and sages that work for the good of God's people, as opposed to those who view the Bible merely as sexist literature. Egalitarian biblical hermeneutics is complex and often depends on the particular interests of the respective egalitarian interpreters. Nevertheless, egalitarian biblical interpreters study biblical texts in the original languages, investigate historical and literary contexts of the texts, and consider the various layers of redaction and textual transmission processes.[17] Sometimes the egalitarian biblical scholars also attend to extra-biblical sources and the interpretation history to explain how other texts and the boundless supply of biblical interpretations shape egalitarian applications of biblical texts to contemporary situations.

Five main principles characterize the egalitarian biblical interpretation practice. They pertain to the interpretation of Gen. 1:26–27, the interpretation of the Garden story in Genesis 2–3, various biblical women characters, various historical contexts as relativizing perceived patriarchal hierarchies, and the central biblical theme of liberation as the meta-topic for the refutation of patriarchy and other discriminatory cultural conditions and worldviews depicted in the Bible.

The first egalitarian hermeneutical principle is focused on the reading of Gen

1:26–27 because it articulates biblical gender equality. Egalitarians stress that both woman and man constitute humankind; both female and male are made in the image of God. Egalitarians also observe that the woman and the man receive the same directive to procreate and to rule over other creatures (Gen. 1:28). The fact that male and female represent God in the first creation story, without any role differentiation or hierarchy, leads egalitarians to affirm that the Hebrew Bible states from the beginning that God created man and woman as equals.

The second hermeneutical principles bolsters the Bible's affirmation of gender equality in Genesis 2, the etiological account of agriculture and marriage. The Garden story reports that human's (*ādăm*) formation solves the problem of no one tilling the soil, just as God builds (*bănăh*) the woman from an aspect (*ṣela'*) of *ādăm* to resolve the notion that aloneness is not good (Gen. 2:18). The descriptor *'ēzĕr kĕnĕgdô* describes the human's matching counterpart. Egalitarians explain that *'ēzĕr* is a term appearing elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible to describe God as helping to rescue the Israelites from oppression. Egalitarians thus reject the idea that the term *'ēzĕr* designates woman to subordinate herself to man.[18] Furthermore, *kĕnĕgdô* denotes a facing or mirror image. In other words, the woman is the man's corresponding counterpart. Thus, to egalitarians, the English translations of *'ēzĕr kĕnĕgdô* should make clear that the resulting husband/wife pair, extracted from the *ādăm*, are equal partners from the beginning.[19] The primary function of Genesis 2 is not to designate hierarchy or patriarchal gender roles but to revel in God's ingenuity in building both a garden and farmers to care for it, as well as equality, interdependence, and unashamed intimacy between the two humans. Together, then, Genesis 1 and 2 establish that woman and man are equal to each other. Jointly and as equal partners, they comprise the image of God. Both narratives connect the characters and the land, and the stories also explain life as the original writers experienced it. Neither story is about patriarchal authority and hierarchy. Unlike complementarians, then, who impose their interpretation of New Testament passages onto the creation accounts in Genesis, egalitarians present the Hebrew Bible's creation accounts as depictions of the egalitarian relations among women, men, the land, and other creatures.

The third principle of egalitarian interpretation is similar to other early second-wave feminist biblical interpretations. It highlights women as previously ignored or misrepresented characters in traditional exegesis and as minimized in complementarian readings. Egalitarians thus interpret the depiction of women in biblical narratives, poems, and songs as examples of faith, wits, courage, and initiative. Egalitarians explain that female characters often act outside of

expected roles; sometimes these characters act beyond gender stereotypes. Although some biblical women use their femaleness to acquire children or marriage, such as Tamar in Genesis 38 or Ruth, other biblical women speak, respond, or live in ways unrelated to reproduction or gender stereotypical roles. Good examples are Zipporah in Exodus 4 or Rahab in Joshua 2. Egalitarians stress that many biblical women are not secondary or marginalized characters even though sometimes women are absent, silent, or set aside in biblical stories.

The egalitarian effort to highlight positive female roles in biblical texts does not include critiques of those biblical accounts in which female characters are heroes or role models as approved by the patriarchal system. For instance, egalitarians do not challenge biblical stories that highlight biblical women giving birth to sons who then carry forward the patriarchal system.[20] Egalitarians do not critically interrogate those tales in which women use their wits and wisdom to lead toward other patriarchal goals, such as the preservation of male characters or patriarchal genealogies. Although even the most positively presented women characters often appear only briefly, egalitarians dwell on the assertiveness of those female characters who cleverly or bravely preserve themselves and Israel, confess faith in Israel's God, or join Israel as models of loyalty.

The fourth hermeneutical principle that egalitarians employ allows egalitarian interpreters to emphasize the particular historical conditions in which biblical texts were originally composed. Egalitarians teach that contemporary faith communities live under different socio-cultural and political conditions than the original target audiences of those texts that became Scripture at a later time. The recognition of this time and space distinction influences how biblical texts are applied to a contemporary situation. Egalitarians thus advise that interpreters need to distinguish between still valid biblical themes and historically specific notions invalid for today's times. This principle applies to the whole Bible, but it is particularly important for the analysis of 1 Tim. 2:10–15. This New Testament passage interprets Genesis 2–3 to restrict women from serving the emerging Christian communities as pastors and teachers. Egalitarians maintain that the recognition of changing historical contexts mitigates the universal application of biblical assumptions, appraisals, and suggestions to today's Christian communities. It is important to egalitarians to identify the limited validity of certain biblical texts beyond their historical setting. Furthermore, egalitarians do not accept interpretations from the early Church as the exclusive way of understanding the Hebrew Bible. Egalitarians insist on relativizing patriarchal ideas and recommendations. In their view, Christians do not have to follow them even when they appear in biblical texts.

The fifth egalitarian hermeneutical principle supports the egalitarian impetus to look at the Bible's meta-narrative. Egalitarians note that biblical texts about the destruction of socio-political hierarchies and the liberation of the oppressed, such as Hannah's song in 1 Sam. 2:1–10, constitute the primary, consistent, and most important theme in the Bible. The recognition of this fact should teach any Bible reader to disregard the Bible as an enforcer of hierarchies. Hence, egalitarians affirm the significance of liberation as the central theme in the biblical canon. To them, this theme demonstrates that the Bible does not endorse ethnocentrism, exclusivism, authoritarianism, or patriarchy. Similar to reformist feminists, then, egalitarians rely on a confessional biblical hermeneutics committed to the Christian tradition, the church, and to God revealed in Jesus Christ. They wish to reform Christianity so that their faith tradition and practice enable gender equality. They approach the Bible as a collection of stories about human experiences with God.[21] Yet other egalitarian interpreters resemble reconstructionist feminists. They seek sweeping changes of traditional ecclesial institutions and society by grounding their critique in women's experiences and by lamenting that women's voices have been ignored for centuries.[22]

In sum, egalitarian readings of the Bible rely on five important hermeneutical principles. They emphasize specific biblical texts, such as Gen. 1:26–27 and Genesis 2, showing that the creation stories are salvific to women. They stress that historical and contextual conditions of biblical authors inform and limit the application of biblical teachings for today. They emphasize liberation as the central biblical theme, and they reject biblical interpretations that align Christianity with sexism and gender discrimination.[23] The main opponents of egalitarian interpreters are complementarian readers who uphold inequitable exegetical traditions and insist on restrictive biblical applications to promote gender hierarchy and discriminatory legislation against women's leadership in evangelical churches. Luckily, despite considerable obstacles, many egalitarians have emerged from evangelical communities. They support gender equality in their biblical interpretations and in their church life, and they work hard to influence evangelical Christians, including complementarians, to read the Bible with egalitarian hermeneutical principles in mind. The next section depicts several influential egalitarian voices as they have surfaced in the last couple of decades.

The Egalitarian Influence in Evangelical Churches

Egalitarian Christians not only interpret the Bible for their own personal edification, but they also communicate their viewpoints in various media to educate other evangelical Christians about the benefits of egalitarian biblical interpretation. They rely on print publications, social media websites, and conferences to persuade evangelicals to rethink how their assumptions about the Bible shape their perspectives and practices related to gender and other intersecting social categories, including race. Egalitarian analog and online discussions teach that the Bible has been used to shape and to uphold a patriarchal worldview that is at the root of human trafficking, domestic violence, sexual assault, and attacks against women and girls. Even in churches with ecclesial hierarchies, many women and men have joined egalitarian groups. They reject well-known complementarian views about gender in the Bible and as applied to today.[24] This section begins with a discussion of egalitarian print publications, moves to an analysis of egalitarian websites, and concludes with a review of egalitarian conference information to illustrate the widespread egalitarian influence on evangelical church life today.

The first major area in which egalitarians educate other evangelical Christians about the benefits of egalitarian biblical interpretation is in print publications. They have written many books to articulate egalitarian biblical readings. They use various approaches to the Bible that mirror and mold biblical and contemporary worldviews, applying them in various ways to contemporary evangelical church life. Egalitarian print publications began to appear in the 1970s; nowadays the early books are considered to be egalitarian classics.[25] Recently published books by Alice Mathews, Lisa Sharon Harper, and Sarah Bessey examine biblical narratives and biblical legislation about women in both testaments.[26] Tara Beth Leach, an ordained minister of a large Pasadena Nazarene church, published a practical and theological primer for women in pastoral ministry.[27] This and similar books encourage women called to the ordained ministry, supporting them through pastoral training and various ministries.

An academic journal of CBE International, the *Priscilla Papers* provides peer-reviewed, interdisciplinary biblical scholarship and social science perspectives on gender.[28] Most articles published in the *Priscilla Papers* are written by biblical scholars. The evangelical theologian Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen explains that egalitarian contributions go beyond biblical exegesis and aim to counter essentialism. She writes:

> There are very few consistent sex differences in psychological traits and behaviors. When these are found, they are always *average*—not absolute—differences, and, for the vast majority of them, the small, average—and often decreasing—difference *between* the sexes is greatly exceeded by the amount of variability on that trait *within* members of each sex. Most of the bell curves for women and men (graphing the distribution of a given psychological trait or behavior) overlap almost completely. So it is naive at best, and deceptive at worst, to make essentialist (or even generalist) pronouncements about the psychology of either sex when there is much more variability *within* than *between* the sexes on most of the trait and behavior measures for which we have abundant data . . . . Thus, even when appeals are made to large *cross-cultural* studies that have found consistent behavioral and/or attitudinal sex differences, we cannot assume universality for those conclusions until we have controlled for the existence of differing opportunities by gender across the various cultures.[29]

Van Leeuwen suggests that women and men are more similar than different. The *Priscilla Papers* thus advocates non-essentialist perspectives based upon psychological research.

The group "Christians for Biblical Equality International (CBEI)" also, sponsors a website, *Mutuality*, which is popular among egalitarians. It discusses immediate and longstanding concerns about gender and related social issues within a Christian-egalitarian framework. Similar websites are maintained by Arise, Scroll, Biblical Christian Egalitarians (Facebook), Christian Feminism Today, and the Junia Project. All of these groups formed during the past two decades. They promote dialog, share resources, engage issues of gendered identity and experience across cultures, and they advocate for women worldwide.[30] The various posts and discussions are grounded in egalitarian biblical interpretation. They challenge patriarchal notions about gender that many evangelical churches rehash even today. Egalitarian websites, blogs, and online resources affirm that the Bible teaches essential equality between men and women and that this equality applies ontologically and functionally to all spheres of life. The online resources also move beyond discussions on biblical texts to cover issues related to pastoral vocation, domestic violence, and intersectionality.[31] Egalitarian bloggers tackle issues of biblical interpretation, ministry, race and intersectionality, human trafficking, domestic violence, sexual assault, and more subtle mistreatment of women. They give space to experiences of women, past, present and future, showing that patriarchal stances and practices are implicated in sexual harassment, domestic violence, and problems faced by those doubly and triply marginalized and by those at the intersection of gender, race, poverty, or legal status.

The Junia Project (JuniaProject.com) illustrates that these discussions are important to egalitarians. Hence, the outreach increases every year. The Junia Project has a compelling story of origins. Initiated in 2013 by egalitarians Gail

Wallace and Kate Wallace Wallace Nunneley, the site has grown to over 12,000 people in 120 countries. The mother and daughter team, who are pastors in Free Methodist churches, were troubled by the conservative views on gender roles as expressed by students registered at Azusa Pacific University in Azusa, California. During APU's Common Day of Learning the two women lectured on the Wesleyan perspective about women in leadership. They continued the conversation by initiating the website. By now, the website has more than seventy volunteer writers contributing more than 350 posts. The page has over 11,000 followers on Facebook, over 7,000 on Twitter, and over 3,000 blog subscribers. Speaking of the Christian Church in general, Gail Wallace states: "Our theology of women and how the dynamics between men and women are played out in the life of the church deeply impacts Christian community, the effectiveness of ministry, and our witness of Christ to the world-at-large."[32] Similarly, one of the volunteer contributors, Teanna Sunberg of Ukrainia, posted "A God Who Calls Women to Pastor" in response to a statement of her daughters' teacher. This teacher asserted that women are inferior and cannot be pastors. Sunberg explains:

> [From] the corner of a now peaceful Maidan Square in Kyiv. This is where Ukrainians dug up the very pavers of the square's sidewalk to shield themselves from bullets in 2014 and 2015. This square evolved into a global proclamation of the Ukrainian will to speak in the fall of 2014 … . I want young women and men to speak up when they see injustice. I want young men and young women to use their feet, their arms, their mouths, and their minds to proclaim peace and well-being in a world where hope often bleeds in the street. And I want young women and men to pastor and preach when they sense God's call on their lives.[33]

The tone of many other contributions to the Junia Project are emotionally charged, filled with passion and energy. Among the titles of recent posts are:

- A Letter to Young Christian Feminists;
- Ten Reasons Why Men Should Not Be Pastors;
- No Words: A Lament for Women;
- A Day in the Life of a Female Pastor;
- Why 1 Timothy 2 Does Not Ban Women from Teaching or Having Authority;
- Why I'm at a Church that Does Not Support Gender Equality.[34]

Another example comes from Rachel Held Evans. She talks about the power of the internet as enabling egalitarians to give voice to previously silenced

women. Held Evans states: “As a woman whose opportunities for Christian leadership were severely limited by the conservative evangelical culture in which I was raised, blogging has given me a voice and a reach I would not have otherwise had.” She explains that evangelical women’s voices often recount “harrowing encounters with abuse in a religious environment.”[35] She also implicates patriarchy in the mistreatment of girls and women. She cites research that proves that “worldwide, women ages fifteen to forty-four are more likely to be maimed or die from male violence than from cancer, malaria, traffic accidents, and war combined.”[36] Many other egalitarians have taken their observations and viewpoints to the online world. They make headway in presenting biblical interpretations and theological positions that would not see the light of day without the internet. Thus, egalitarian websites offer platforms to egalitarian women to explain why some of them remain in complementarian churches. Some women find egalitarian faith communities while others leave organized religion altogether because they reject ecclesial patriarchy and do not have patience anymore to try changing their congregations. Some egalitarian women also mention that, in their view, God’s long history of serving only male interests in the churches is too long.[37] Thus, some egalitarians leave institutional Christianity because of the denial of equal rights to women. Yet many women also join egalitarian churches or start their own egalitarian congregations. The feminist theologian Carol Christ observes that women’s yearning for God is often coupled with anger at God; it is important for women not to endure silently patriarchal church practices that neglect, marginalize, or denigrate women but to stand up to them and to resist.[38] Many egalitarians do just that, and the online world is often a beginning for their emerging egalitarian consciousness.

Sometimes egalitarian online discussion boards respond directly to concocted accusations of heresy articulated by opponents. In defense, egalitarians explain that they take the Bible seriously, are faithful adherents to the Christian faith, support motherhood and homemaking, and do not deny gender differences between females and males. For instance, egalitarians state: “[We] believe the Bible promotes two senses of equality: equality of nature and equality of opportunity. Neither requires or even hints that women and men are or should be identical. Egalitarians don’t deny difference; we deny that difference is destiny.”[39] Egalitarian websites thus feature many posts that promote the many pastoral roles within which women express their love of God and their neighbors. These posts refute the complementarian notion that motherhood is every women’s “highest calling.”

Third and finally, egalitarians organize many events and conferences that

gather egalitarian women for networking opportunities in challenge to ecclesial patriarchy and inequality in contemporary culture. Often they base their agendas on egalitarian exegesis. Examples include SheLeads, an organization sponsored by Missio Alliance and several Christian universities and seminaries; the Courage Conference that addresses the relationship between abuse and patriarchy; the Wesleyan Holiness Women's Clergy Conference; as well as special events such as *Unauthorized, Nevertheless She Preached*.[40] *Unauthorized* describes itself as a dynamic grassroots event in Waco, Texas, celebrating women's voices in the pulpit. The website states: "After centuries of underrepresentation and misrepresentation in our pulpits, churches, denominational leadership, and seminaries, we who have so often been silenced stand together to celebrate our voices. In the spirit of the brave women who have gone before us, we add our voices to theirs—in praise, in partnership, in proclamation, and in protest."[41] In short, the egalitarian influence in evangelical churches is steadily growing in print publications, online websites, and the organization of various egalitarian conferences across the country.

From Egalitarian Readings of the Bible to Church Practice: Concluding Observations

Egalitarian exegetes, theologians, bloggers, and speakers have developed a solid discourse on the Bible that endorses ordination of women pastors and female denominational leaders in evangelical congregations. Egalitarians challenge biblical and theological positions and practices that aim to limit women's contributions in evangelical church life. They also expose the patriarchal oppression of women broadly and support the equality of women in society. Egalitarian positions are relayed to Christian women around the world, including in traditional and complementarian congregations. Since egalitarians make their exegetical, theological, and social positions accessible to lay people, they enjoy large audiences. As egalitarians have creatively taken advantage of digital technology, their online discourse successfully counters complementarian and fundamentalist Christian positions in Western and non-Western cultures. Because their digital media posts reach people worldwide, egalitarians have the potential to uncover oppression and minimize inequality on a global scale, an opportunity that is relatively new, iconoclastic, and even radical.

If women had had equal access to platforms and pulpits throughout the

centuries, societies influenced by Christianity around the world would have been very different. Considering the universal restrictions on women's ordination in 1891, B. T. Roberts, the founder of the Free Methodist Church, wrote with regret: "It is impossible to estimate the extent to which humanity has suffered by the unreasonable and unscriptural restriction which have been put upon women in the churches of Jesus Christ. Had they been given, since the days of the first Apostles, the same rights as men, this would be quite another world."[42] The same point applies to the problem of sexual assault in churches, homes, and workplaces. If more women were pastors, far more women would come forward after being harassed or molested. Women would sense and receive support after reporting and fleeing abusers and hostility at home, at work, and in churches. Shelter and treatment would not only be accessible and safe, but also the influence of women in authority would have also decreased violence and the incidents of sexual abuse of both sexes.[43]

Furthermore, if more Christians were egalitarian today, including Roman Catholics and members of "non-denominational" mega-churches, the power of patriarchy and other oppressive systems would subside. Instead, traditional Roman Catholic discourse restricts women from priestly roles. Roman Catholics see male priests as representatives of the male Christ and as the image, sign, and representation of Christ before God. They believe a mysterious bond unites Christ, maleness, and the priesthood.[44] Catholic movements for the ordination of women, female seminary professors, and women parish pastors dispute this reasoning, and, like evangelical egalitarians, they advocate for women and children. For greater influence locally and globally, egalitarians could partner with Roman Catholics who fight against patriarchal thought and practice so deeply ingrained in both Christian systems.

Egalitarians and other feminists should join forces by intentionally affirming those biblical readings about which they agree, despite their differences on the Bible's authority. Both groups reject the ramifications of patriarchal interpretations leading to the abuse and the marginalization of women. Both groups also oppose patriarchal gender roles that traditionalists and complementarians advance. These opponents of feminism use the fundamentalist slippery-slope argument, accusing egalitarians of biblical and theological liberalism that strikes fear in potential moderates and egalitarians. Other feminists, Protestant and Roman Catholics egalitarians should work together to make progress on equality a reality. They could partner against sexual harassment and domestic violence, and they could work together for the advancement of women in political office and the development of a justice

system that eliminates patriarchal bias. Academic egalitarians engage feminist biblical scholarship to strengthen egalitarian interpretations,[45] but other egalitarians should do so as well. Feminists and egalitarians could also unite to celebrate equality where it already exists, such as the right for women to vote. Egalitarians and other feminists should provide biblical and ecclesial models for collaboration, equality, and mutuality, because the world needs all kinds of feminists to uproot patriarchal belief systems and practices wherever they persist.

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[1] See Karen Strand Winslow, "Redemptive Feminist Exegesis in North American Evangelicalism," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Retrospect (Vol. 2: Social Location)*, ed. Susanne Scholz (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014), 269–89.

[2] See Mimi Haddad (the president of CBE, 2001–present), "Empowered by God: The Rich History of Evangelical Feminism," *Sojourners* (August 2009), 29–31.

[3] For the CBE International's Mission Statement, visit https://www.cbeinternational.org/content/cbes-mission.

[4] Rachel Held Evans, "Patriarchy and Abusive Churches" (March 14, 2014); available at https://rachelheldevans.com/blog/patriarchy-abuse. Other websites include http://www.recoveringgrace.org/2014/02/charlottes-stori/ [accessed March 1, 2019].

[5] Kate Wallace Nunneley, "Why I Am a Feminist and an Egalitarian (And Why They Aren't the Same Thing)" (October 4, 2013); available at http://juniaproject.com/feminist-and-egalitarian-not-the-same/ [accessed November 15, 2017]. See also Michael Jensen, "Perhaps Feminism Is Not the Enemy?," *EternityNews.com* (April 16, 2015); available at https://www.eternitynews.com.au/opinion/perhaps-feminism-is-not-the-enemy/ [accessed November 11, 2017]. He states there: "Male power allowed to run unchecked has all too rarely resulted in the freedom and the flourishing of women in human history."

[6] Kate Wallace Nunneley in a private email interview on October 12, 2017. Carolyn Custis James defines egalitarianism in the following way: "Egalitarians believe that leadership is not determined by gender but by the gifting and calling of the Holy Spirit, and that God calls all believers to submit to one another"; see Carolyn Custis James, *Half the Church: Recapturing God's Global Vision for Women* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 154.

[7] In 1987, *The Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (CBMW) organized to stem the tide toward equality that they feared groups, such as Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE), were generating.

[8] See the post entitled "Is God Male?" at http://juniaproject.com/is-god-male/ [accessed March 1, 2019]. Complementarian John Piper argues that English male-centric translations be chosen over more accurate gender inclusive terms to provide Christianity with a masculine feel and support male leadership; see "The Frank and Manly Mr. Ryle: The Value of a Masculine Ministry: God, Manhood & Ministry: Building Men for the Body of Christ," Desiring God, Conference for Pastors in 2012; posted January 31, 2012; available at http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-frank-and-manly-mr-ryle-the-value-of-a-masculine-ministry [accessed March 1, 2019]. See also Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 440.

[9] [Complementarians] "believe the Bible establishes male authority over women, making male leadership the biblical standard"; see James, *Half the Church*, 154.

[10] In the past, "evangelical" was descriptive of those who spread the good news of the gospel. However, the public has begun to see this adjective as a label for fundamentalists and the politicized Christian right. Reformed and Baptist perspectives receive the most press as "evangelical," and many of them are complementarian. However, Wesleyans (Nazarene, Free Methodist, the Wesleyan denomination, some Pentecostal-Holiness groups) affirm gender equality.

[11] The term "non-egalitarian" is used here to identify feminists broadly defined, without regard to religious persuasion, who would not self-identify as biblical egalitarians, even though they favor gender equality.

[12] See Esther Fuchs, *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative: Reading the Hebrew Bible as a Woman* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), esp. 19, 28–30.

[13] For an analysis of egalitarian interpretation of women in the Bible, see Susanne Scholz, "Essentializing Woman: Three Neoliberal Strategies in Christian Right's Interpretations on Women in the Bible," chap. in *Introducing the Women's Hebrew Bible Feminism: Gender Justice, and the Study of the Old Testament* (second rev. and exp. ed.; New York, NY: Bloomsbury / T&T Clark, 2017), 149–69, esp. 150–53. Scholz and Fuchs explain that some feminist exegetes and many Christian-right authors of popular books on

women in the Bible fail to recognize their adherence to neo-liberal assumptions and reading strategies.

[14] Contra Fuchs, *Sexual Politics*, 19, 28–30.

[15] Contra Fuchs as quoted in Scholz, "Essentializing Woman," 152–53.

[16] See, e.g., Phyllis Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 41.1 (March 1973), 30–48; Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1978); Letty M. Russell, ed., *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1985).

[17] An example is the basic biblical and historical overview of the issues in Mathews, *Gender Roles and the People of God: Rethinking What We Were Taught about Men and Women in the Church.* Mathews relies on text critics to stress that the passage on "women should be silent in the churches" in 1 Cor. 14:34–35 appears in different locations in early manuscripts, which she claims indicates a textual interpolation (pp. 107–11). See also Larry Hurtado cited by Ben Witherington, "Is 1 Cor. 14.34–35 an Interpolation or a Pauline Dictum?," *Bible and Culture* (October 12, 2017); available at http://www.patheos.com/blogs/bibleandculture/2017/10/12/1-cor-14-34-35-interpolation-pauline-dictum/#WmltlYzdclmr1UAB.01 [accessed March 1, 2019].

[18] See, e.g., Deut. 33:7; Ps. 10:14; 22:19[20]; 33:20; 70:5[6]; 40:13[14], 17[18]; 94:17; 146:5; 29; 115:9–11.

[19] Egalitarians openly rely on the contributions of Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation"; see, e.g., Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says about a Woman's Place in Church and Family* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 22. See also Richard Hess, "Equality with and without Innocence," *Discovering Biblical Equality*, ed. Ronald Pierce and Rebecca Groothuis (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2005), 86.

[20] Thus, egalitarian productions are subject to the criticism by Esther Fuchs, "The Neoliberal Turn in Feminist Studies," chap. in *Feminist Theory and the Bible: Interrogating the Sources* (Feminist Studies and Sacred Texts; Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), 55–70; Susanne Scholz, "Essentializing Woman," chap. in *Introducing the Women's Hebrew Bible* (second rev. and exp. ed.; New York, NY / London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 149–69.

[21] See, e.g., Anne Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 33.

[22] Ibid., 33–35.

[23] For a more detailed presentation of the differing approaches to the Bible of complementarians and egalitarians including, see Winslow, "Redemptive," 269–89.

[24] Alan Johnson, ed., *How I Changed my Mind about Women in Leadership: Compelling Stories from Prominent Evangelicals* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010). Many more women and men who are not "prominent" have more compelling stories of their rejection of traditional and complementarian gender roles.

[25] For examples, see Winslow, *Redemptive*, 275, 282.

[26] Alice Mathews, *Gender Roles and the People of God: Rethinking What We Were Taught about Men and Women in the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017); Lisa Sharon Harper, *The Very Good Gospel*: *How Everything Wrong Can Be Made Right* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2016); Sarah Bessey, *Jesus Feminist: An Invitation to Revisit the Bible's View of Women* (New York, NY: Howard Books, 2013).

[27] Tara Beth Leach, *Emboldened: A Vision for Empowering Women in Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Intervarsity Press, 2017). See also Carolyn Custis James, *Half the Church: Recapturing God's Global Vision for Women*, cited above.

[28] Cbeinternational.org/resources/article/Priscilla-papers/.

[29] Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, "Social Science Studies Cannot Define Gender Differences," *Priscilla Papers* 27.2 (2013); available at https://www.cbeinternational.org/resources/article/priscilla-papers/social-science-studies-cannot-define-gender-differences. Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen is professor of psychology and philosophy at Eastern University, St. Davids, PA.

[30] Cbeinternational.org/blogs; https://www.cbeinternational.org/content/mutuality-magazine; Juniaproject.com; facebook.com/groups/BiblicalChristianEgalitarians/; eewc.com. Other sites were founded by Kelly Ladd Bishop, Sarah Bessey, Marg Mowczko, Rachel Held Evans, and Jory Micah; available at kellyladdbishop.com/; sarahbessey.com/; margmowczko.com/; rachelheldevans.com/blog/4-common-misconceptions-egalitarianism/; jorymicah.com/. See also "49 Seriously Good Blogs for Egalitarians," by Gail Wallace; available at http://juniaproject.com/49-seriously-good-blogs-christian-egalitarians/.

[31] Karen Gonzalez confirms that egalitarianism must be intersectional. "Authentic egalitarian theology is not meant to only address gender inequality; [its] mission is Christian unity, restoration, redemption, justice, and wholeness for all people . . . . I am a Christian, but I have not ceased to be Latina, Guatemalan, an immigrant, and a woman; "Apple Picking Theology: The Intersectionality of Jesus," *Mutuality* (June 5, 2017); available at https://www.cbeinternational.org/resources/article/mutuality/apple-picking-theology-intersectionality-jesus?platform=hootsuite [accessed March 1, 2019].

[32] Gail Wallace, "Towards a Deeper Theology of Women" (March 31, 2014); available at http://juniaproject.com/towards-a-deeper-theology-of-women/ [accessed December 5, 2016].

[33] Teanna Sunberg, "A God Who Calls Women to Pastor" (May 25, 2017); available at http://juniaproject.com/god-who-calls-women-pastor/ [accessed March 1, 2019].

[34] These posts and others may be found at http://juniaproject.com/best-of-2016-this-years-top-ten-posts/.

[35] Rachel Held Evans, "Let's Start at the Beginning, Shall We?" (June 4, 2012); available at https//:Rachelheldevans.com/blog/mutuality-adam-eve [accessed October 31, 2017].

[36] Rachel Held Evans, "Patriarchy and Abusive Churches" (March 14, 2014); available at https://rachelheldevans.com/blog/patriarchy-abuse [accessed March 1, 2019].

[37] See, e.g., Beth Woolsley, "How I Became a Heretic, or How the Evangelical/Conservative Church Lost Me," *BethWoolsey.com* (September 6, 2017); available at http://bethwoolsey.com/2017/09/how-i-became-a-heretic-or-how-the-evangelical-conservative-church-lost-me/ [accessed March 1, 2019].

[38] So explained in Mathews, *Gender Roles*, 232–33.

[39] Tim Krueger, "5 Things Egalitarians Believe about Gender Differences," CBE's *Mutuality Magazine* (June 5, 2017); available at https://www.cbeinternational.org/resources/article/mutuality/5-things-egalitarians-believe-about-gender-differences?platform=hootsuite [accessed March 1, 2019].

[40] Missioalliance.org/sheleads; cbeinternational.org/events/; courageconference.com/; ashleyeaster/courage.org/; whwomenclergy.org; facebook.com/neverthelessshepreached/.

[41] Facebook.com/neverthelessshepreached/.

[42] B. T. Roberts, *On Ordaining Women*, 1891 (Indianapolis, IN: Light and Life Press, 1992, 2003); also see the newly published edition, edited by Benjamin Wayman (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015).

[43] The ongoing sexual abuse by church leaders who belong to the Southern Baptist Convention demonstrates this issue. The *Houston Chronicle* and *San Antonio Express-New* uncovered it when investigative reporters collected 380 allegations in twenty states. The SBC is complementarian; they do not allow female teachers or preachers while member churches have hired convicted sex offenders. See Robert Downen, Lise Olsen, and John Tedesco, "Abuse of Faith: 20 years, 700 victims," *Houston Chronicle*

(February 10, 2019): https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/investigations/article/Southern-Baptist-sexual-abuse-spreads-as-leaders-13588038.php [accessed March 1, 2019].

[44] The Vatican's *Declaration on the Order of the Priesthood*, "Inter Insigniores" issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith concerning the admission of women to the ministerial priesthood, *Origins* 6:33 (February 3,1977): 517–24, and *L'Observatore Romano* (February 1977): 6–8. See also: https://www.academia.edu/11903156/Women_Priests_Women_Pastors_and_the_Image_of_God, and: https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/pope-francis-confirms-finality-ban-ordaining-women.

[45] Often this influence is indirect; see, e.g., Winslow, *Redemptive*, 282–87.

CHAPTER 33

ANIMAL STUDIES, FEMINISM, AND BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

KEN STONE

THIS essay takes its point of departure from the significant work of feminist and womanist biblical scholarship in exposing and analyzing how gender, kinship, and power undergird the interpretation of biblical literature. It further suggest that reading these texts in dialog with contemporary animal studies sheds additional light on the dynamics of gender, kinship, and power articulated in many of these narratives. First, the chapter briefly summarizes some of the ways animal studies and feminist studies have engaged one another outside of biblical scholarship. This overview also notes a possible connection to queer studies that contributes to the interpretation of biblical texts. It uses the connection between animal studies and feminist studies, and to a lesser extent queer studies, as a reading frame. Next, the chapter returns to the Hebrew Bible, identifying the implications of this frame for the interpretation of several women characters. By focusing specifically on matters of gender and power, the discussion brings animal studies to feminist biblical interpretation.[1]

ANIMAL STUDIES AND FEMINIST STUDIES

Although the phrase “animal studies” now appears frequently in academic publications, book series titles, conference papers, proposals, and program units,

it does not lend itself to a simple definition. Numerous introductions to this growing area of research have been published, indicating the emergence of a recognized interdisciplinary academic subspecialty.[2] Yet even a cursory examination of such introductions reveals that not all of them focus on the same questions or scholars.

The diverse ways of understanding contemporary animal studies result in part from a characteristic that it shares with feminist studies: animal studies has impacted multiple academic disciplines. While at first the biological and ethological sciences primarily studied animals, nowadays scholars in history, philosophy and philosophical ethics, literary and cultural studies, and the social sciences take animals seriously. As has long been true for feminist scholarship, questions about animals, animal-human relationships, and animal symbolism reshape methodological approaches within these academic fields. Religious studies, too, is being reconceived methodologically in relation to animal studies.[3] Also like feminist studies, animal studies refuses to be constrained by traditional boundaries drawn between the fields in which it appears. Some scholars of animal studies even transgress the boundaries between the natural and the human sciences.[4]

However, the relationship between animal studies and feminist studies is variable. One of the most widely discussed texts in animal studies scholars, Peter Singer's influential *Animal Liberation*, reworks material written against women's equality. It opens with a discussion of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Singer notes that when Wollstonecraft's book was first published, the philosopher Thomas Taylor parodied it by publishing an anonymous work titled *A Vindication of the Rights of Brutes*. Taylor's goal, to make Wollstonecraft's argument for women's equality look ridiculous, points out that comparable arguments could be used to support the equality of animals—the "brutes." Apparently Taylor assumed this conclusion would be so self-evidently ridiculous to his readers that they would apply its weaknesses to the arguments for women's equality. Yet, Singer, writing in a different context, uses Taylor's juxtaposition of women and animals to suggest that "if we examine more deeply the basis on which our opposition to discrimination on grounds of race or sex ultimately rests, we will see that we would be on shaky ground if we were to demand equality for blacks, women, and other oppressed humans while denying equal consideration to nonhumans."[5]

In a sense, Singer flips Taylor's argument. If we have rightly come to recognize that discrimination and oppression based on sex and race are wrong, then what is our justification for halting the relevance of arguments used to

combat sexism and racism at the species line? Thus Singer makes a case for the "equal consideration of interests" for animals by rhetorically comparing "blacks, women, and other oppressed humans" with non-human animals. If the refusal to give "equal consideration" to the "interests" of others on the basis of sex or skin color is rightly condemned as sexism or racism, so too must the refusal to give "equal consideration" to the "interests" of suffering animals be denounced as "speciesism."

More thorough consideration of the relationship between the oppression of women and the oppression of animals emerged in the work of Carol Adams, who became well known for emphasizing the relationship between feminism and the analysis of meat-eating societies.[6] Whereas Singer used struggles against sexism and racism as an analogy for struggles against speciesism, Adams rejects analogical thinking in favor of the investigation of what she calls "interlocking systems of domination."[7] Noting that she is "interested in intersections,"[8] Adams situates animality within the systemic "intersectional" analysis of sex and race that has become crucial for contemporary womanist and feminist criticism, including biblical criticism.[9]

As part of her analysis, Adams underscores what she calls "the roots of animal exploitation in the construction of the patriarchal subject."[10] Numerous social forces and cultural assumptions lead us to associate women, animals, and emotion with one another, and over against the vaunted "man of reason." Adams explicates such dynamics in terms of what she calls "the sex-species system." This phrase indicates that the mistreatment of animals is social, structural, and institutional, a fact that Singer also recognizes when he deploys the term "speciesism" as a parallel to sexism and racism. For Adams, however, sexism and speciesism are not parallel processes of mistreatment. They are closely connected to the point of being interrelated with other forms of oppression. Across her writings, Adams illustrates how men associate women with animals —particularly edible ones. Women are even sometimes referred to as "meat," as if their bodies were available for consumption by men. Various types of advertising play upon this metaphorical association. Moreover, men are often assumed to be eaters of meat rather than vegetarians. Adams suggests that certain biblical passages, such as Leviticus 6, reinforce this assumption, according to which only males eat the meat of the sin offering.[11] Indeed, because "'real' men eat meat," it is often the case that "refusing meat means a man is effeminate, a 'sissy,' a 'fruit.'"[12] Thus Adams sees a link between vegetarianism and the struggle against patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity. She associates rape with the slaughter of animals for meat, titling one of her essays "The Rape

of Animals, the Butchering of Women."[13]

Ultimately, then, Adams emphasizes interrelations and associations that are systemic in nature, as she makes clear in passages such as the following:

> The species barrier has always been gendered and racialized; patriarchy has been inscribed through species inequality as well as human inequality. The emphasis on differences between humans and animals not only reinforces fierce boundaries about what constitutes humanness, but particularly about what constitutes manhood. That which traditionally has been seen to distinguish humans from animals—qualities such as reason and rationality—has been used as well to differentiate men from women, whites from people of color. Species categorization is one aspect of a racist patriarchy . . . . The best way to convey this analysis of the overlapping, interdependent relationship of sexual inequality and species inequality is by referring to our current racist patriarchy as instituting a *sex-species system*.[14]

Several contributors to animal studies may recognize points of convergence between this critique of the sex-species system and views articulated by Jacques Derrida that are influential among animal studies scholars.[15] As different as their thinking is in other respects, both Adams and Derrida suggest that dominant structures of Western society, symbolism, and subjectivity privilege male over female, human over animal, and the eating of meat in interrelated ways. At stake for both of them in the depiction of "animal" is its juxtaposition to the traditional definition of "human," or better yet "man," which each of them wishes to challenge.

This is the context in which Derrida coins a neologism, "carnophallogocentrism." It adds the prefix "carno-" to a term more commonly used among feminists, "phallogocentrism." "Carnophallogocentrism" as a concept partly glosses what Derrida calls the "dominant schema" for the Western subject. This term refers to what Derrida, like Adams, understands as an "ideal" subject formed through a number of constitutive exclusions. Above all, this subject is a human, defined by the exclusion of animals. Yet, that exclusion is only one of the assumptions undergirding the Western subject. "There have been, there are still," Derrida reminds us, also many human beings "who are not recognized as subjects and who receive this animal treatment."[16] So as many feminist thinkers, including Adams, emphasize, the subject is not simply human but "preferably and paradigmatically the adult male, rather than the woman, child or animal."[17] Finally, the subject, according to Derrida, is not just any male: "[T]here was a time, not long ago and not yet over, in which 'we, men' meant 'we adult white male Europeans, carnivorous and capable of sacrifice."[18] Thus the dominant male subject is characterized not only by an additional specification of age, race, and nation ("we adult white male Europeans") but also

by a particular type of relation to animality. There is, Derrida tells us, a "sacrificial structure" to Western subjectivity and culture, a structure that includes "a place left open . . . for a noncriminal putting to death" of both non-human animals and certain humans.[19] As a normative male subject kills and eats animals, he is categorized by what Derrida calls "carnivorous virility." The "authority and autonomy" associated with the subject are "attributed to the man (*homo* and *vir*) rather than to the woman, and to the woman rather than to the animal."[20]

How likely is it, Derrida asks, that someone could become a "head of state . . . by publicly, and therefore exemplarily, declaring him- or herself to be a vegetarian?" While he acknowledges exceptions, Derrida's point is that Western societies expect a leader to be "an eater of flesh." Our society thus trivializes vegetarianism, which is often understood to be unmanly and hence incompatible with being a "head of state." "To say nothing," he goes on, "of celibacy, of homosexuality, and even of femininity (which for the moment, and rarely, is only admitted to the head of whatever it might be, especially the State, if it lets itself be translated into a virile and heroic schema . . .)."[21]

This recognition that both celibacy and homosexuality should be included alongside animality and femininity among the constitutive exclusions that define the carnophallogocentric subject reminds us of Adams's observation that "refusing meat means a man is effeminate, a 'sissy,' a 'fruit.'"[22] Indeed, Derrida's characterization of the assumptions and practices that he calls "carnophallogocentrism" resonate with Adams's characterization of the sex-species system. As different as their writings are, both thinkers offer insights into the recurring tendency to disparage humans recognized as different—whether on the basis of gender, race, nation, sexuality, class, or other markers of difference—by animalizing them, turning them into beasts who can be treated like animals.

Both Adams and Derrida recognize that the traditional valorization of man over woman and human over animal goes back to the ancient world. Thus, unsurprisingly, this binary is also found in biblical literature. Each of them, for example, explicitly engage the book of Genesis and other biblical texts as part of their explication of the roots of this valorization.[23] These references to biblical literature have led other scholars, working at the intersection of feminism and animal studies, to reconsider these texts. It is partly on the basis of Derrida's reading of the Garden of Eden story, for example, that feminist philosopher Kelly Oliver concludes that "in the Judeo-Christian tradition, animal difference and sexual difference are intimately associated from the beginning of time."[24] Oliver also notes, in agreement with Derrida, that it is necessary but not

sufficient to ask how animal difference and sexual difference relate to one another. One must also pluralize both animal differences and sexual differences, multiplying the lines, permutations, and relations within and between both sets of differences. Against the tendency, particularly among philosophers, to speak about "the Animal" in the generic singular when contrasting "man" and "animal," Derrida repeatedly calls attention to the diversity of species and the need for attention to multiple similarities and differences between humans and other animals and among animals themselves.

As Oliver notes, these similarities and differences extend to sexual differences, both between species and among members of the same species, including humans. In Oliver's words: "[J]ust as there is a multitude of animals, there is a multitude of sexes and sexualities … just as there are vast varieties of animal species and animal sexes, there are vast varieties of human animals and human sexes."[25] Recognition of these "vast varieties" of "animal sexes" and "human sexes" may point toward opportunities for a queer reading of carnophallogocentrism in and beyond biblical literature.[26]

Re-Reading the Biblical Texts

In a valuable article on the representation of horses, donkeys, and other equines in the Hebrew Bible, Heather McKay notes that "[f]or the Hebrew Bible the human control of animals is as unproblematic as . . . the patriarchal control of women."[27] In light of the arguments of Adams, Derrida, or Oliver, however, we can ask whether the Hebrew Bible does not construe the interrelations among animals, women, and patriarchy more closely than even McKay indicates. For example, when Samson refers to the woman of Timnah as his heifer whom other men plow (Judg. 14:8), the metaphor does not stand in isolation from other biblical images and assumptions that associate women and animals. Rather, it fits within a web of suppositions that we can understand in terms of Adams's sex-species system, or Derrida's notion of carnophallogocentrism.

It is certainly not difficult to see in Samson's tale a story of "virility," to recall another word that Derrida associates with carnophallogocentrism. As Susanne Scholz points out, Samson is characterized as a "macho man" whose "masculinity is relentless, violent, and divinely endorsed."[28] One feature of this virility is his desire for women, including not only the woman of Timnah but also a prostitute or "sex worker" in Gaza (16:1) and Delilah.[29] Samson's

manhood is challenged, of course, when other men use his woman to decipher his riddle, a fact that Samson himself seems to acknowledge when he complains that they have "plowed with my heifer," surely a "double entendre and veiled accusation of adultery or perhaps rape."[30] Yet, Samson responds both to this challenge and to the subsequent giving of his woman to another man as one would expect a "macho" hero to respond: through assertive demonstrations of his power over the Philistines who challenge him.

It is important to note, however, that these demonstrations of Samson's power also involve power over animals, specifically the foxes he uses to burn Philistine fields. An action that Wil Gafney rightly recognizes as "a wanton act of cruelty."[31] Both the Timnite woman and foxes become objects with which Samson and other men joust in their games of manhood. If the woman of Timnah is best understood alongside the sex worker from Gaza and Delilah, the foxes are best understood alongside other animals used by Samson, including the lion he kills, the kid whose dismemberment is favorably compared to the lion's death, the bees whose honey Samson eats, the kid brought by Samson to the woman's house, and the donkey who supplies the jawbone that Samson uses as a deadly weapon. In short, Samson attempts to perform his masculinity through his relations with both women and animals.

In this respect, Samson is not altogether different from another biblical character who might seem at first to have little in common with him. Jacob is also characterized in part through his interactions with both women and animals.[32] He works for fourteen years for women and six years for animals (Gen. 31:41), and in Genesis 30 he succeeds both in proliferating human offspring through his relations with women and proliferating young animals through his relations with flocks of goats and sheep. If Jacob seems otherwise quite different from Samson, the divergence results from the fact that Jacob interacts primarily with domesticated animals, especially goats, sheep, camels, cattle, and donkeys (Gen. 32:14–15). Samson does interact with young goats, but also wild animals. In that respect, he seems similar not to Jacob but rather to Esau, the hairy hunter, another biblical "wild man."[33] Still, in both cycles, women are associated with animals.

The juxtaposition of women and animals is even more widespread in the Hebrew Bible. For instance, the version of the tenth commandment that appears in Exod. 20:17 uses masculine linguistic forms to warn a male audience: "You will not covet the house of your neighbor. You will not covet the woman of your neighbor, or his male slave, or his female slave, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." Women and animals are both placed

with slaves in a shared category of desirable objects. More strikingly, in 2 Samuel 12, Nathan represents Bathsheba (*bat-sheva*) as a female lamb who is loved like a daughter (*bat*) by the poor man who owns her. The poor man's lamb is said to "lie on his bosom" (2 Sam. 12:3), a phrase implying an intimate association. Yet, a rich man, who has his own flocks and herds, steals the lamb and feeds her to his guest. As Nathan explains, the rich man represents David, who has stolen another man's woman (lamb) rather than being content with the women (flocks and herds) God had given him. The lamb beloved like a daughter (*bat*) who is taken and served as food represents *bat-sheva*, the woman whom David uses for sex. Although God, Nathan, and David view the actions in this story negatively, a basic comparability between the woman as sexual object and the daughterly lamb as an edible object allows Nathan's parable and oracle to make sense. Derrida's phrase "carnivorous virility" appropriately characterizes the interwoven dynamics of eating an animal and having sexual relations with a woman in 2 Samuel 12.

Two other women, described by Gafney as being "butchered like meat," are the daughter of Jephthah in Judges 11 and the Levite's woman in Judges 19.[34] Mieke Bal compares the daughter of Jephthah to the woman of Timnah since both die by fire as a consequence of words spoken by men and actions taken by fathers.[35] In distinction from the Timnite woman, however, the daughter in Judges 11 is not referred to as an animal metaphorically. Rather, she is physically treated like an animal when her father turns her into a literal burnt offering (Judg. 11:30–31, 39). Her status, not simply as a woman but also as a child, makes her available for such a death at the hands of her father.[36] The woman of Judges 19, often referred to as "the Levite's concubine," also fits into this series of animalizing stories. Her raped body is placed on an animal, specifically a donkey (Judg. 19:28), after the Levite finds her on the doorstep. Further the Levite treats her body like that of an animal when he cuts it into twelve pieces.

Anticipating Gafney's language, Adams cites this story as an example of what she calls the "sexual butchering" of women.[37] The butchering of this woman's body also has an animal parallel in 1 Samuel 11, where Saul takes a "pair of cattle" (11:7), cuts them into pieces, and sends the pieces throughout Israel as a warning that those who do not join him in battle will be treated like the cattle. Saul slaughters these cattle in Gibeah (11:4), the very city in which the woman in Judges 19 is raped. In both cases, the message from Gibeah—what Bal calls the "body language"[38]—produces a response from the Israelite audience. In distinction from Bathsheba and the women of Jacob, then, the three women animalized in Judges are all slaughtered. Each of these women live with

the consequences of the fact that, to recall Oliver's words, "in the Judeo-Christian tradition, animal difference and sexual difference are intimately associated from the beginning of time." They live under the constraints of carnophallogocentrism, and the sex-species system. Each of them are objects that male characters use.

Yet, not all male characters carry the same status within this literature. As noted by Derrida, Adams, and others, sex-species systems do not only undergird the domination of women and animals by men. They also undergird the justification of the slaughter of some men by others. Again in Judges, Samson not only butchers animals, he also kills numerous Philistines. Moreover, he murders them as part of a pattern in the book of Judges and elsewhere in the Bible according to which non-Israelite men are, as Scholz puts it, "feminized, sexualized, dehumanized, and hence discredited as foreigners, the others, who deserve contempt, ridicule, sexual violence, and even murder."[39] Scholz uses these words specifically about the story of Ehud's killing of Eglon, a Moabite king whose name probably means "bull calf" or "young bull," whose brutal killing in Judges 3 functions as a kind of symbolic same-sex rape.[40] Even so, the same dehumanization and feminization applied to the Moabites can be seen when the Philistines are associated with animals. Samson attacks the Philistines with burning foxes and kills many of them with a donkey's jawbone. Further still, there are repetitive rhetorical references in Judges and Samuel to the Philistines' foreskins.[41] Within biblical literature, an uncircumcised man is the wrong kind of *man*. As an improper specimen, in a certain sense, these narratives describe the Philistines as *not men at all*. Or, as David Jobling suggests, the frequent references to the Philistines as "uncircumcised"—or, perhaps more literally, "foreskinned"—in Judges and 1 Samuel occur in the context of a representation of those Philistines as in some sense "womanish."[42] This depiction of circumcision and gender is rather different from accounts, often informed by psychoanalysis, that see circumcision itself as a sign of "unmanning."[43] It does, however, recognize that in ancient Israel and among certain Western Semitic neighbors—although not among the Philistines—some form of circumcision characterized manhood.[44] In the immediate context of biblical literature, then, not circumcision but its absence "unmans."

Of course, Samson, too, is threatened by unmanning. His unstable masculinity provides points of entry for queer readings of the Samson cycle.[45] If, as Oliver notes, "there are vast varieties of human animals and human sexes,"[46] we can also see that the nature of Samson's manhood shifts across the trajectory

of his story. His angry riposte to the men who use his Timnite woman to interpret his riddle is grounded in a context in which men utilize relations with women to assert their precedence over other men, demonstrating thereby both their own superior masculinity and the inferior masculinity of their rivals.[47] The sexual overtones of Samson's language about "plowing with my heifer" indicate that his anger is comparable to the anger an Israelite man might feel if other men were calling his manhood into question by making him a sexual "cuckold."[48] Feminists have long recognized the subsequent shearing of Samson's hair by Delilah as a kind of symbolic castration[49] or even rape.[50] When he is made to "grind" (Judg. 16:21), he does work that elsewhere is associated with women (e.g., Eccl. 12:3; Job 31:10). Finally, the act of putting Samson on display before the Philistines as entertainment may also be understood as "sexually humiliating."[51]

The latter scene, moreover, also threatens to animalize Samson. The Philistines gather literally "to sacrifice a great sacrifice to their god" (Judg. 16:23). The language of sacrifice assumes the presence of animals. The narrator's description of the Philistines who are present for the sacrifice includes a phrase, "their hearts were merry" (16:25), also used to describe the enjoyment of eating in many other biblical texts, including in Judges (19:6, 9, 22). If the Philistines derive pleasure from the sacrificial animals they eat, they also derive pleasure from the sight of blind Samson performing for them like some animal in a circus.

Significantly, however, Samson turns the sacrificial tables on them. His hair has been growing again (Judg. 16:22), as one would expect with such a manly man. Samson's hairiness may contrast with the merry-making Philistines, who are represented in ancient art with less hair than the Israelites.[52] As Nathan MacDonald notes, the description of the Philistines coming "to sacrifice a great sacrifice to their god" has an intriguing parallel in 2 Kgs. 10:19. There Jehu invites worshippers of Baal to "a great sacrifice for Baal." Yet Jehu is setting a trap. After sacrifices and burnt offerings have been made, he orders the slaughter of all the worshippers of Baal. So, too, in Judges 16. Those who have come to sacrifice are slaughtered when Samson destroys the place in which the worshippers of Dagon are gathered. In both stories the "great sacrifice" has "a double meaning. There will indeed be a great sacrifice, but not the one envisaged by the worshippers, a sacrifice of the worshippers and not of animals."[53] In spite of his own death, then, Samson's manhood is restored while the Philistines, like the woman of Timnah, the daughter of Jephthah, and the woman in Judges 19, meet the fate of sacrificial animals.

Conclusion

As we have seen, the interaction of animal studies and feminist biblical studies deepens and broadens possibilities for biblical interpretation. Although the results of this interaction do not necessarily produce entirely new biblical meanings, they reinforce insights about the oppressive nature of such texts. The Bible emerges not only as androcentric but as carnophallogocentric literature, an expansion that also has implications for other categories of domination, such as racism, homophobia, eco-devastation, and colonialism. The story of the Timnite woman, Samson's "heifer," illustrates the possibilities. She is imagined as an animal-like creature: one used, slaughtered, easily forgotten, and ignored. Likewise, as a group the Philistines disappear from the readerly horizon.

Still, it is also clear that feminist strategies for reading and scholarship do not always map neatly onto animal studies approaches, as feminist theorist and animal studies scholar Kari Weil notes. She points out, for example, that animals "cannot speak for themselves, or at least they cannot speak any of the languages that the academy recognizes as necessary."[54] Yet, feminist scholars emphasize the importance of the "voices" of women and minorities to counter "the underrepresentation and misrepresentation of groups of people under the forces of sexism and racism."[55] For precisely this reason, Weil and other animal studies scholars suggest that animals provide us with especially acute examples of the challenges we face when we attempt to confront difference and otherness.[56] Clearly, however, as Weil also notes: "[M]anhood is sought through the joint sacrifice of women and animals" in most literatures.[57] This is certainly also true for biblical literature. Thus, feminist and queer biblical scholars may find it useful to engage the new species of critical analysis that continue to emerge from animal studies.

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CHAPTER 34

A MULTIDIMENSIONAL APPROACH IN FEMINIST ECOLOGICAL BIBLICAL STUDIES

ANNE ELVEY

On March 11, 2017, Melbourne daily newspaper *The Age* carried an article by journalist Crispin Hull entitled "I saw the Great Barrier Reef die last weekend, and I wept."[1] About a year earlier, numerous reports described scientists weeping at the major bleaching of coral in the reef. Warming seas, due to climate change, are a major factor in this event—one which many fear may be irreversible. The projected death of the Great Barrier Reef is but one instance of largely human-induced ecological damage that occasions responses of fear, grief, denial, and sometimes indifference. One question, not normally asked, is whether biblical scholars also weep over this destruction. What echoes do we hear in the biblical corpus regarding ecological devastation and attendant social dislocation, such as the response to extreme weather events or rising oceans on low lying atolls, islands, and deltas? What ethics of biblical interpretation do such events call forth? Does feminist biblical interpretation inform approaches to biblical literature responsive to the ecological traumas of our time?

Four terms warrant attention. First, this chapter utilizes the phrase "ecological feminism" over the contraction "ecofeminism" to give weight to the category "ecological." Second, "ecological thinking" refers to the self-understanding that we as humans are part of, rather than separate from, "nature."[2] Third, "nature" is a problematic term when it is used anthropocentrically to signal human-

supremacy and separateness in relation to the rest of creation. Fourth, the term "more-than-human" refers to "nature" as both human and other-than-human, and reflects an ecological rather than an anthropocentric self-consciousness; it also resists the binary division of human/non-human.

This essay posits that two bases for ecological feminist biblical hermeneutics stand in unavoidable tension: the partial intersection of feminist and ecological analyses and interests are contradicted by the priority of ecological ethics over feminist ethics. Consequently, the chapter maintains that feminist ecological approaches must be multidimensional.[3] Not only do ecological feminists recognize material and conceptual links between oppression of women and destruction of Earth, but these links are impacted by broader frameworks of oppression based not only on gender but also on class, race, sexuality, and species. For example, the legacy of European colonization in Australia contributes to a situation not only of ongoing dispossession of Indigenous people and denial of their sovereignty. It also underscores the misappropriation and misuse of Indigenous lands and waters. Fragile soil has been compacted through inappropriate agricultural practices. Flows of major river systems have been severely diminished due to irrigation. Mining rights are given precedence over hard-won Native Title. Over ten years of Federal Government Intervention undermine decades of work by Indigenous people for self-determination in Northern Territory communities. Another example of the multidimensionality needed for ecological feminist approaches is the unequal impact of climate change on human communities. Poorer communities, such as in Bangladesh and the West Pacific, whose use of fossil fuels are low, are nevertheless often the first to feel the effects of climate-change related disasters. They also have less economic resilience than their fossil fuel guzzling partners. Moreover, while women in these communities suffer disproportionately, they act as agents of change—evidenced through the Chipko Movement, Love Canal, and the Kenyan Green Belt Movement.[4] Val Plumwood identifies the underlying ecologically destructive systems of consumer capitalist mastery that affects women, Earth, and indigenous peoples as "a logic of colonization."[5] This system of mastery defines these groups as the subordinated "other" of man, culture, and the mind/soul. In short, the divine sits on the side of man, whereas the human is on the side of woman. So, too, spirit is valued over and in opposition to matter, and communities subject to colonial regimes bear the multiple impacts of a colonizing logic and practice.

The essay builds a picture of a multidimensional ecological feminism in six sections. The first section discusses resonances between feminist and ecological

philosophies, theologies, and biblical studies. The second section considers violence against Earth as the primary prompt in an ecological feminist hermeneutics. The following four sections focus on aspects of a multidimensional reading approach that recognizes the multiplicity of Earth and what is needed for ecological feminist reading in partnership with Earth. They highlight material agency, human responsibility, and that Earth and humans are co-agents and partners in the reading process. The conclusion points toward contextual biblical studies in which feminist, postcolonial, queer, and ecological approaches share a mutually informing ethics for reading. It also resolves that ecological feminist readings need to be multidimensional in relation both to the multiplicity of the Earth community itself and the intersections of oppression on the basis of class, race, gender, sexuality, location, and species.

Feminism, Ecological Feminism, and Biblical Studies

Feminist analyses often resonate with ecological approaches, although feminist biblical interpreters do not always foreground ecological concerns. Two aspects of the relationship between feminism and ecology stand out. First, ecological feminism emerges as a branch of feminist rather than ecological thought. Second, and more specific to biblical studies, feminist hermeneutics contribute strongly to the development of ecological hermeneutics, especially in the Earth Bible project.

Traditions of ecological feminism, beginning in the 1970s and developing in the 1980s and 1990s, have their feet firmly planted in second-wave feminism.[6] Key proponents of ecological feminism have generally been critical of mainstream globalizing capitalist underpinnings of ecological destruction and oppression and adhere to a range of feminist and ecological positions, ranging from radical feminism to liberal feminism and from socialist feminism to deep ecological analysis.[7] Womanist, Latin American, African, Asian, Maori, and Australian Indigenous theorists, including theologians, similarly recognize that most women experience multiple oppressions. Those oppressions shape their experiences of ecological destruction while local epistemologies inform their ecological understanding and praxis at the same time.[8]

The inclusion of ecological concerns is more varied in feminist biblical studies. For instance, noted feminist biblical scholar Elisabeth Schüssler

Fiorenza discusses “changing horizons” in feminist interpretation, but does not explicitly mention ecological, ecojustice, or ecological feminist approaches to biblical interpretation.[9] Similarly, the anthology, *Feminist Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century: Scholarship and Movement*, edited by Schüssler Fiorenza and published in 2014, does not deal specifically with ecological feminist biblical interpretation although Elsa Tamez, Susanne Scholz, and Renate Jost mention ecological criticism briefly.[10] As Tamez explains, ecological feminist theology is more prevalent in Latin America than ecological feminist *biblical* studies. This is true generally.[11] While Schüssler Fiorenza does not address ecological studies directly, her feminist critique of intersecting human-animal/male-female dualisms resonates with Australian environmental philosopher Plumwood’s critique of dualism as a “logic of colonization.”[12] Moreover, Schüssler Fiorenza’s analysis of the role of global capitalism and its kyriarchal “totalitarian global monoculture” echoes critiques of a primarily ecological focus.[13] Ecological thinking on biodiversity and more-than-human agency resembles but does not simply extend feminist concerns for diversity and women’s agency as counter-forces to kyriarchy.

Even so, other ecologically focused biblical interpreters refer directly to feminist interpretive practices.[14] Early reactive responses to ecological crisis took either apologetic or unsympathetically critical approaches to the biblical text, especially when they responded to Lynn White’s famous 1967-article “The Historical Roots of the Ecological Crisis.”[15] More nuanced approaches developed in two major projects. The first, “Earth Bible Project,” began in the late 1990s in Adelaide, South Australia.[16] The second, “Uses of the Bible in Environmental Ethics Project” was carried out at the University of Exeter in the U.K. In particular, the Earth Bible Project has displayed its indebtedness to critical feminist approaches.[17] Both the Earth Bible and the Uses of the Bible in Environmental Ethics projects have been key to the SBL Ecological Hermeneutics Section. Nevertheless, despite individual essays and occasional books that advance ecological approaches that are informed by feminist, womanist, liberation, or *bosadi* thinking, a strongly focused ecological feminist hermeneutics has not been developed in Hebrew Bible studies. In my view, a multidimensional approach is needed that begins from the reality of violence against Earth.

Violence against Earth as the Primary

Prompt in Ecological Feminist Hermeneutics

This violence carried out against Earth and its biodiversity is the primary prompt in an ecological feminist hermeneutics. Just as feminist biblical scholars interrogate violence against women,[18] ecological feminist work shows that this violence intersects with other creatures and Earth itself.[19] In this sense, ecological feminism recognizes that women experience not only gender-based violence but also violence on the basis of race or sexual identity, age, class, and location, so that their experience of violence is multidimensional. The ecological feminist hermeneutic thus shows that the violent de-creation of Earth in the flood and biblical sacrifices are examples of violence against Earth embedded in the relationship between land, law, people, and the divine. These issues intersect and interact with violence against women, the land, and animals.

As Anne Gardner highlights, Genesis 6 tells of creation's undoing. In a reading of Gen. 6:11–13, Gardner emphasizes the repetition of words for destruction in relation to Earth (*erets*), which the text describes as corrupt (*tishacheth*); filled with violence (*chamas*) (2x); corrupt (*nishchath*); corrupted (*hishchith*); and which G-d will destroy (*mashchitham*).[20] The Hebrew words translated in English as "corrupt" and "corrupted" connote destruction. This story describes violence on a grand scale, a divine de-creation of Earth. In contrast to this destruction toward Earth, the flood and its aftermath become moments for re-visioning human responsibility in connection with the rest of creation. Tikva Frymer-Kensky argues that in the post flood situation, G-d gives law in response to "the undirected and lawless activity of humankind and the pollution that results."[21] She claims that biblical "laws do not prevent violence" but "they do protect the earth from being polluted by lawless behavior."[22] G-d desires the protection of Earth, an inhabited Earth, "where human ideals of harmony [including harmony between women and men] can be fulfilled."[23] Earth without humans is not a biblical ideal, and to Frymer-Kensky, the entire act of creation, including humankind, is a gracious act of divine desire.[24]

But how gracious is this G-d? In a world of male genealogy (Gen. 5:1–32), daughters appear as a problem (Gen. 6:1–4); their intercourse with the sons of G-d/gods (*bene Elohim*; the power relations suggest a lack of consent) becomes the prompt for divine violence against Earth (Gen. 6:5–7). G-d is implicated in the actions of the *bene Elohim*, in the echo of a divine name Elohim, and through G-

d's censoring of humankind, represented by the daughters and their offspring (Gen. 6:1–7). Two traditions (conventionally, Yahwist and Priestly) interweave in the narrative, with Yhwh intending to "blot out from the earth the human beings … animals and creeping things … and birds of the air" (Gen. 6:7) and Elohim "determined to make an end to all flesh" (Gen. 6:13). Conflict between divine power and women's agency underscores deep violence toward Earth and its creatures.

Relations of destructive power between divine creator and creation mirror those between humans and animals. The narrative depicts human power and violence toward other creatures. While the flood narratives describe more-than-human agency positively, as humans rely on birds for news of the abatement of the flood (Gen. 8:6–12), humans nonetheless offer other animals in sacrifice. The burnt offering to Yhwh from "every clean animal and every clean bird" repeats the violence of the flood (Gen. 8:20). Ironically, the materiality of burnt flesh also contributes to the "pleasing" odor that prompts the divine promise to refrain from further destruction of Earth (Gen. 8:20–22). In summary, the flood narratives display complex intersections of violence against women, Earth, and other creatures, but in ways that also affirm divine and human turning from the destruction of Earth and toward Earth's ongoing creative unfolding.

In the flow of the biblical narrative readers might expect the flood story to signal the end of animal sacrifice. But animal sacrifice is not unique to the flood narrative. Rather, it is part of a wider multidimensionality of power that affects and even defines people and land/Earth. For Regina Schwartz, the violence of sacrifice is indicative of a violence foundational to the relationship between land, law, people, and G-d. The promise of land identifies ancient Israel. Schwartz explains: "From promising beginning to bitter end, the narrative is preoccupied with Israel's identity as landed. Even as lack, land is defining."[25] Possession of the land depends not only on practices of social justice. According to Schwartz, it also relies on monotheism, fidelity to one G-d, and the regulation of marriage.[26] Schwartz also argues that the identity of Israel is instituted in a covenant which inscribes violence on the bodies of animals (Gen. 15:5–21).[27] Although the covenant is cut in stone rather than flesh at Mount Sinai, animal sacrifice underwrites the covenant (Exod. 24:3–8), and the killing of human kin enforces the doctrine of monotheism (Exod. 32:26–28).[28] Thus, the flood story does not indicate the end, but rather one example of animal sacrifice in the biblical corpus.

Even the description of biblical sacrifice underscores the destructive relationship between G-d and creation. The Hebrew biblical term for making a

covenant is *carat berit* "to cut a covenant." The sacrifice that accompanies a covenant cuts both animal bodies and relationships between creator and creation. Interpreter Yvonne Sherwood considers biblical sacrifice as "cutting up life."[29] In her view, sacrifice as "cutting" ensures the distinction between humans, (other) animals, and the divine. Sacrifice also safeguards a further division between humans, animals, the divine on the one hand and plants and inorganic matter on the other.[30] Generally, then, sacrificial violence safeguards hierarchical dualism. This sacrificial insurance has implications for the exercise of oppressive power across the multiple dimensions of gender, ethnicity, species, location, and Earth itself. In a contemporary context, the critique of biblical sacrifice resonates with questions about what can be eaten, where our clothes are made, what we use for fuel to travel, to keep warm or cool, what is "for life," and whose lives are given up for human sustenance and comfort, and for the excesses of elites. Ecological feminist interpreters should keep in view the violence of biblical and current "sacrifice," including the substitution of other animals, whole species, childhoods (to labor), and women (to trafficking), for the maintenance of an ecologically unsustainable status quo.

For ecological feminists, when biblical narratives identify Earth as female and exploitable, they legitimize violence against Earth, women, and girls. Violence against women and girls in our contemporary world has precedents in biblical literature (e.g. Judg. 11:29–39). It often intersects with constructions of land as female, and cannot be sidestepped in ecological readings.[31] For instance, when narratives describe the Promised Land as flowing with milk and honey, they personify the earth as feminine with maternal and erotic overtones.[32] Similarly, in the story of Rahab, women's bodies create borders through "the feminization of lands and sexualization of women," among them especially the idea of "foreign" women.[33] Finally, in the prophetic books, patriarchal and colonial attitudes to women and land intersect, reflecting dominant and oppressive associations of women and land in ancient West Asia.[34] As Emily Colgan argues, in Jer. 6:1–8 and 51:25–33 land is characterized as a city which, in turn, is portrayed as a woman. In this instance, divine punishment is imaged as sexual violence toward the land, city, and women.[35] These few examples are not isolated but rather indicative of the pervasive problem of intersecting violence toward Earth and women in biblical literature.

The violent character of animal sacrifice, the problematic identification of women's bodies and land, and the construction of "foreign" women's bodies and sexuality illustrate the multidimensionality of biblical violence against Earth. Violence is not the whole story, but it echoes the contemporary destruction of

Earth and its creatures, including women and many others. These echoes prompt ecological feminists to offer a response to such violence, beyond a hermeneutics of suspicion and a critique of texts of terror. Violence against Earth and its constituents, including humans, should lead ecological feminist readers to consider how Earth itself responds to such violence and how humans can understand themselves better as co-inhabitants of a more-than-human Earth community.

Matter and Creation

This section argues for a turn toward the material ground of human-Earth-divine relations in ecological feminist readings. It introduces the concept of material agency as a basis for ecological feminist descriptions of Earth's responsiveness in creation. For example, according to Elaine Wainwright, an ecological reading engages in a process that brings together "selected biblical methodologies with ecological thinking."[36] This mindset recognizes that human sociality is a subset of a wider ecological sociality. The ecological embeddedness of humankind together with the complex socio-political intersections of power and difference among humans are part of the multidimensionality that must inform ecological feminist hermeneutics. Uniting both aspects of this multidimensional ecological thinking—namely interconnectedness and exercises of power—is the shared materiality of all creation.

The notion of material agency derives from the twenty-first-century development dubbed a "material turn" in ecological philosophy.[37] New materialists construe nonhuman things as actants and speak of "collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces," beyond human ones.[38] For instance, Jane Bennett explains that writing produced by a solitary human at a desk emerges from multiple participants, including "intestinal bacteria, eyeglasses … as well as the plastic computer keyboard, the bird song from the open window, or the air … in the room … . "[39] An ecological feminist hermeneutics, informed by new materialism, thus assumes that human actions intersect with non-human acts in complex ways. In ecological thinking, multidimensionality applies to more than human agents.

When ecological feminists focus on material agency, they resist habitual anthropocentrism. They highlight the more-than-human actors that are part of every action. They also pay attention to material co-agencies that make up

complex events such as climate change. Human activity produces the release of carbon into the atmosphere, and so humans affect climate change. Often forgotten is the fact that the material properties of fossil fuels also affect climate change. Similarly, the rise of sea levels occurs in part because of the material properties of glaciers under the impact of global warming. Both human and non-human activities produce ecological events. In short, climate change should be understood as a multi-actant process that has been driven overwhelming by human activity since the industrial revolution.

Insights about the material co-agencies of complex events such as climate change, also apply to ecological feminist interpretations of the creation narrative in Genesis 1. Writing before the groundswell of new materialism in philosophy, Catherine Keller reads Gen. 1:2 to understand material agency in creation. Keller draws on process theology and deconstruction to unsettle the Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* (from nothing). She emphasizes instead an origin-ary chaotic materiality, signaled in the text by *tohu vabohu*.[40] She also resists the dualism of an immaterial creator acting to bring into being a material creation.[41] To Keller, this dualism echoes the hierarchical dualism of man/woman, which, as Plumwood argues, supports the logic of human mastery over "nature."[42] Yet, in reading Gen. 1:2, Keller implies a co-agency of matter with the divine in the act of creation.

Gen. 1:9–10 reinforces this material co-agency in creation, as the dry ground appears in response to the divine call. Norman Habel names this appearing "geophany."[43] Afterwards, G-d commands Earth to put forth vegetation (Gen. 1:11). Not only is chaotic primeval matter co-agent in creation, but the Earth also exercises co-agency with the divine. The paradigm of this agency is responsiveness, modelled on call-response. Ecological feminist readers ask if the pattern of call-response between creator and creation reflects relationships of mastery or mutuality in Genesis 1 and its interpretations.

According to Keller, primeval "chaotic" matter is lost in Christian approaches to creation that elide the depths, *tehom*.[44] This omission is both an ecological and a feminist issue because it abandons mythic feminine depths represented by Tiamat, replacing it with fear.[45] Thus, feminist ecological readings need to be attentive to creation's *tehomic* multiplicity.[46] For Keller, the Spirit will "breeze through" even the "tightest" and most anti-woman, anti-Earth, and kyriarchal texts.[47] She warns against rejecting rather than engaging with such "tight" texts, the "texts of terror."[48]

Even in their violence, such terrifying texts bear traces of the co-agencies of

matter, the maternal, sisters and daughters, the other, and the plurality of Earth and universe.[49] The disturbing account of Earth's de-creation in the flood of Genesis 6, for example, should remind ecological feminist readers that weather and water are co-agents with the divine in bringing about the inundation. Trees provide wood for the ark. Birds act to give news of the flood's abatement. In texts that are themselves conveyed via physical media, material agencies everywhere give shape to the multidimensional social and spiritual relations between humankind and Earth.

In the Genesis flood narratives, these social and spiritual relations find a focus in questions of human responsibility.[50] For ecological feminists, human responsibility toward Earth is part of a broader question of human identity. When ecological feminists understand humans to be part of a wider more-than-human Earth community, they affirm a non-anthropocentric perspective. They not only highlight where androcentrism and anthropocentrism intersect in texts, but also where biblical interpreters can resist or counter anthropocentrism.

Humankind and the *Imago Dei*

Ecological feminists challenge Western individualist aspirations and a social imaginary founded in ideas of human power over Earth and human separation from each other and from other creatures. They seek a more realistic understanding not only of the multiplicity of human experience and its shaping of identity but also of the complexity of human interdependence and interconnectedness with Earth and each other. As many indigenous peoples are keenly aware, humans are interconnected with their habitats and their co-creatures. With this in mind, ecological feminists ask how a biblical understanding of humans created in the image of G-d stands in relation to an understanding of human interdependence in a more-than-human Earth community. This section maintains that the creation narratives of Genesis 1 and 2 present the creation of humankind in ways that are both helpful and problematic from an ecological feminist perspective. In juxtaposition, these texts highlight both the ecologically helpful and problematic aspects of each.

In Genesis 1, humans emerge simultaneously as dependent on and potential controllers of the land (Gen. 1:28–29). Habel argues that the human story interrupts the narrative of the Earth story. In this sense, "humans are set over and against Earth."[51] For Habel, the "orientation of the human story (Gen. 1.26–28)

is overtly hierarchical: humans are authorized to rule other creatures and to subdue Earth."[52] Rejecting a more sympathetic reading, Habel suggests that the verb *kabash* involves "forceful subjugation, including enslavement" and recalls the conquest of the land of Canaan.[53] Taking a feminist perspective on Gen. 1:26–28, Ellen M. Ross asks: "What use have feminist theologians for a concept that characterizes human persons as imitators of a God who is often portrayed as a male deity?"[54] Similarly, ecological feminists may ask: "What use have ecological theologians for a concept that characterizes human persons as imitators of a G-d who is portrayed as master even destroyer of creation?"[55]

Yet, Genesis 1 also offers evidence for the equality of women and men made in the divine image (Gen. 1:27). This co-creation of woman and man unsettles a male-female hierarchy. On this basis, a similar argument can be made with respect to animal-human hierarchies. In Gen. 1:30, G-d makes provision for all of creation to be fed, not only humans. Thus, the text suggests equality between humans across gender, ethnicity, and race, including on the level of basic needs, and between humans and other creatures. When read next to Gen. 1:11, the passage of Gen. 1:29–30 implies that Earth puts forth vegetation (1:11) which the divine gives as food (1:29–30). The co-agency of Earth with the divine, in the provision of food, weakens the human separation from animals. It also unsettles the subordination of Earth that Habel reads in Gen. 1:28–29.[56] As feminist readers have preferred to interpret women's stories and female agencies, ecological readers retrieve and highlight narratives about Earth's agency.[57] The implication for human identity is this: diverse human stories are part of an Earth story not the other way around.

Genesis 2 offers a different account of co-agency. Here, G-d forms the groundling (*ha-adam*) in co-agency with the ground (*adamah)*. Further, G-d puts the groundling into the primeval garden to serve it (2:7, 15). In contrast to Genesis 1, Earth is without vegetation prior to the formation of the groundling (Gen. 2:5). Once the groundling is en-livened with the divine breath (Gen. 2:7), G-d plants a garden and puts the groundling there (Gen. 2:8). Moreover, G-d places the groundling into the garden to till/serve (*le'abedah*) and keep it (*leshamerah*) (Gen 2:15). From a feminist perspective, the sexual differentiation of the groundling and the etiology (Gen. 2:23) are problematic. In Hebrew the masculine gender of the noun, *ha-adam*, does not refer strictly to maleness. Nevertheless, the narrative prioritizes the male as the primary human creation, as centuries of mainstream/malestream reception give evidence. Likewise, from an ecological perspective, the text prioritizes humankind, albeit as a servant of the garden.

The multidimensional ecological feminist understanding of human identity in the Earth-human stories of Genesis 1 and 2 holds in tension four issues: (1) the exercise of Earth's co-agency with the divine in the creation and sustenance of humankind and other creatures; (2) the priority of Earth versus the priority of humans in creation; (3) the characterization of humans as both masters and servants of Earth; and (4) the valorization of humankind as Earth beings in the image of the divine both prior to and across difference. If ecological feminists are to go beyond the kyriarchal assumptions embedded in these narrative tensions, they need new strategies for revisioning human identity ecologically as *imago Dei*. Schüssler Fiorenza's tactic of reconstruction is helpful in this regard. In relation to Christian ecclesiology, she explains that "the patriarchal model must be transformed into the church of self-identified women and men who identify with women's struggles."[58] In a multidimensional approach, women themselves are challenged not only to self-identify, but also to identify with the struggles of other women and men impacted by social oppressions and ecological trauma. While Western paradigms of "identity" focus on an individualized self, Schüssler Fiorenza envisages communities in which identity is reconstructed in a decolonizing direction, and the privileged identify with the struggles of the dispossessed. Ecological feminists reconstruct human identity in relation to the multiplicity of Earth "identities" so that humans are "Earth-identified." The challenge for humans, particularly those influenced by Western thought, is fourfold: (1) to identify with those humans (including future generations) most impacted by environmental damage; (2) to identify with more-than-human, not only human, struggles in contexts of ecological destruction; (3) to identify themselves as interconnected and interdependent Earth creatures, embedded in habitat, grounded in ground, and infused by atmosphere; (4) to recognize Earth as a multiplicity of acting subjects. Any independent human self-identity is at worst a dangerous invention and at best partial. The next section takes up the fourth challenge and considers how Earth can be recognized as agent in the reading process.

Earth's Agency

As the Earth Bible Project affirms, Earth is a subject in its own right, having voice, and being capable of resistance.[59] The Earth "pushes up" as it were into biblical texts and our readings of them.[60] The Earth acts in our readings when: (1) the Earth's current contexts of climate change, deforestation, and biodiversity

loss speak into or prompt the reading of a text; or humans impacted by ecological damage speak out on behalf of the planet; (2) Earth and its more-than-human constituents are identified as active characters in a text; (3) an Earth voice is identified and retrieved through a process of reconstruction. This section illustrates each type of Earth's agency in ecological readings.

First, Earth acts in a reading when readers attend to contemporary contexts of violence toward Earth and speak out on behalf of Earth. For example, in light of the deforestation of rain forests in the region of Sarawak, Sun Ai Lee-Park offered a re-interpretation of the "forbidden tree" of Gen. 2:16–17.[61] For Lee-Park, logging threatened the way of interconnected human-forest life and identity, affecting "all living beings in the world."[62] This insight prompted her to suggest that the sovereignty of G-d be affirmed in contrast to the domination of humans. They need to understand themselves afresh in the light of both ecological limits and divine sovereignty. This interconnected identity has resonance for Park in the prophetic linking of the land, people, and G-d.[63]

Second, readers identify Earth or other creatures as active characters in a text. For example, Arthur Walker-Jones takes up the question of the agency of the "forbidden tree." He suggests that taking the perspective of the serpent challenges sexist, heterosexist, and anthropocentric dualisms that the texts and its reception re-inscribe.[64] He explains: "For humans who mistakenly understand themselves as separate from nature, the snake, the tree of knowledge of good and bad, and the land become the main, symbolic representatives of nature in the story."[65] He asserts that the biblical description of the serpent as *'arum* is ambiguous, and links the snake's acuity with the tree of knowledge of good and bad. He states: "The wild animal who will guide the humans to the knowledge of good and bad is identified from the beginning as characterized by an intellectual ability capable of being used for good and bad."[66] In this reading, the serpent becomes "a boundary figure," a wild creature who teaches humans, in cooperation with the divine. It enables humans to gain the knowledge required to fulfill their vocation to serve the land.[67] In its self-regenerating capacity, the snake unsettles heterosexist assumptions about reproductive boundaries. Moreover, the serpent blurs "the dualism of spirit and nature," as it seems to be part animal and part divine in its knowledge of good and bad, and by implication it challenges the hyperseparation of humans and (other) animals.[68]

Finally, Earth acts in a reading when readers identify, retrieve, and reconstruct the voices of Earth or other creatures in a text. For instance, while the serpent, who is neither human nor divine, is a voiced character in Genesis 3,

the ground is silent. Building on work recovering silenced voices of women from biblical texts, Shirley Wurst reconstructs the voice of the ground, a character which in traditional readings is both silent and cursed.[69] Wurst's reimagined ground affirms humans as kin and calls "listen to me." The ground calls out for justice: "Why am I cursed for another's action?" Like Rebekah, the ground offers to bear the "curse" on behalf of "her" child, humankind.[70] At the close of Genesis 3, the so-called "cursed" ground is "as we know it" and not the idealized ground of many readings of Genesis 2.[71] Wurst imagines the ground calling to humans with an Earth voice: "Beloved, come back to me."[72]

Two aspects of this imagined Earth voice stand out. First, humans are capable of responding to Earth's call. Second, the address "beloved" implies a mutuality of relationship between Earth and humans. Two Earth Bible principles inform these understandings: the principles of voice and mutual custodianship. Both are themselves in debt to indigenous perspectives on human-Earth relations. In short, a multidimensional approach not only highlights intersections of colonialist, sexist, hetero-normative, and Earth-destroying violence, but it also recognizes that ecological hermeneutics develop in dialogue with feminist, indigenous, and counter-colonialist discourses. An image for such dialogue is partnership that, as an ecological priority, invites a reading in partnership "with" Earth.

Perspectives for Reading with Earth: Earth and Humans in Partnership

Multidimensional Earth-human partnerships appear in many guises. Laura Hobgood-Oster describes how wells in Genesis function as meeting places, even catalysts for relationship, as she notes especially the questions the wells bring to the reader.[73] Carole Fontaine listens for forgotten voices of Earth when she heeds Canaanite echoes in Genesis 49.[74] She notices the "earth related nature of the blessing divinities," and she suggests that blessings are a natural phenomenon.[75] Ellen Davis reads the Bible from an agricultural perspective, explaining: "The land instantiates limits that God has set; we encounter it as a fellow creature to be respected and even revered."[76] Biblical examples of Earth-human partnership suggest models for reading both the biblical text and our times in partnership "with" Earth.

Wisdom literature provides a paradigm for understanding Earth and humans in partnership through the biblical concept of a "way" (*derek*). For example, Wurst argues that the "way" of "Woman Wisdom" is eco-kinship. Katherine Dell claims that Earth's way is evident in the cycles of life in Ecclesiastes.[77] Woman wisdom has agency and voice, and Wisdom literature affirms Earth's way, Habel maintains.[78] While patriarchal values still shape the Wisdom texts, both Wisdom and Earth can subvert patriarchy paradigms and re-contextualize our readings, enabling us to read "with" Earth.[79]

One key feature of reading "with" Earth is attention to Earth's cry. Davis considers how people's relation to the land functions in the Hebrew Bible. For example, a drought-prone land prompts particular vulnerabilities in its people, which is reflected in their relationship to the divine.[80] Scholars also link Earth mourning to the land/Earth drying up in drought (Hos. 4:3).[81] Earth's mourning signals the interrelationship of people, land, law, and G-d, and the Earth impacts of failures in this relationship, even the failure inherent in the violence of sacrifice that underwrites the land-law-people-divine relationship. Earth and humans in partnership cry out against these failures.

Walter Brueggemann analyzes the primacy of the cry of the oppressed in Exodus, a cry which prompts divine and human response.[82] Jan Morgan applies Brueggemann's model of cry to Earth. Readers hear the contemporary Earth cry not only in the effects of climate change, deforestation, or extinctions, but also in the human voices of scientists and poets, climate migrants and activists, as well as in hurricanes and rising seas.[83] In this model, the Earth cries out on behalf of humans, as they are part of the larger Earth community. Ecological feminists imagine Earth crying out in response to violence against women, indigenous peoples, and the exploitation of children. They ask whether the mountains mourn with Jephthah's daughter and her female companions as she faces the violence of her father's vow (Judg. 11:37). Humans are part of an Earth community, and violence toward one affects the other. Ecological feminist responses to such violence affirm a model of Earth-human partnership in which human mourning and protest communicate Earth's cry.

No ecological feminist reading is without tension. In the notion of Earth's cry, pressure exists between what a scholar attentive to Earth can and cannot know. The interpreter's imagination becomes both essential and potentially unreliable. Engaging this tension is a necessary hermeneutic risk. Employing the imagination becomes an embodied exercise of Earth-human partnership in ecological feminist interpretation. Ecological readings intersect with feminist

approaches in multiple ways, sometimes in tension, as ecological trauma calls forth a change of perspective and a reading mode attentive to Earth's call.

Conclusion

This essay begins with contexts of ecological trauma, such as evidenced by the bleaching of the Great Barrier Reef or the lived realities of climate migrants. It then suggests that an ecological feminist hermeneutics needs to be multidimensional in ways that account for the multiplicity of human experiences, not only of social power and injustice, but also of ecological devastation. In an ecological feminist frame, multidimensionality does not only describe the complexity of human experiences of oppression and violence based on race, class, gender, sexuality, or location. Rather, these dimensions extend beyond human experience to the complex plurality of Earth and its many creatures. There is a tension between speaking about the multidimensionality of human experience and analyzing humankind as a category of creatures. This hesitation occurs because humankind as a category has a universalizing impulse erasing differences between humans. The essay thus focuses on more-than-human plurality as it plays out in ecological and feminist biblical interpretation. The aim is to outline elements of a multidimensional ecological feminist biblical hermeneutic.

Making connections between feminist and ecological approaches, the essay suggests that just as violence toward women prompts feminist interpretations, violence toward both Earth and women prompts ecological feminist approaches. It then describes four conceptual themes that build toward a multidimensional biblical hermeneutic responsive to Earth. First, we need to acknowledge the shared materiality of Earth and its creatures, including humans, as the starting point for considering the multiple agencies at work in biblical texts and interpretations. Second, human self-understanding and responsibility need to be imagined in the context of the story of material co-agency. Whereas for many indigenous readers such self-understanding and responsibility has been long known, Western-influenced readers need to reimagine their deep interconnectedness in and with a multiple Earth community, and a feminist ecological biblical hermeneutic teaches such reimagination. Third, the affirmation of the multiple agencies of Earth implies a recognition that Earth and members of the Earth community affect biblical readings. This is the most counterintuitive point from a Western perspective, since most biblical scholars

usually see their work as a human enterprise; they forget that all human work is embedded in and supported by wider material agencies that affect, even influence, that work. For instance, ecological readings arise because the Earth has given signs of human-induced ecological damage. In this sense, the Earth influences biblical interpretation when scholars listen and respond to Earth's "cry." Fourth, attention to an Earth voice implies a model of partnership in the process of ecological feminist reading. Such partnership requires readerly openness toward other-than-humans, not simply as characters in biblical texts but as parts of the world and as materially constitutive of the media in which the text presents itself. Such partnership includes attention to the multiple human voices that teach interpreters about contemporary ecological concerns and their impacts.

Looking forward, the development of ecological feminist approaches to the Hebrew Bible and Old Testament is much needed. Scholars, writing from ecological, feminist, postcolonial, and queer approaches share intersecting interests and critiques of domination. They acknowledge and resist the colonizing logic evident in ecological destruction, the dispossession of indigenous peoples, violence against women, and subordinating constructions of the "Other / other." Multidimensional reading strategies that take account of these intersecting interests and critiques must work contrapuntally with contemporary geopolitical and sociopolitical contexts and histories.[84]

Such work also needs to forge connections between ecology and postcolonialism. Especially ecological feminist scholars who work in countries with a relatively recent history of European colonization need to pay attention to their social and political contexts. As Judith McKinlay maintains, postcolonial perspectives must be brought to biblical interpretation as a matter of ethics.[85] A postcolonial critique must join ecological criticism. Similarly, a counter-colonial or decolonizing ethics that values conversational movements across cultures and historical contexts must embrace ancient biblical and contemporary local texts. Such readings are characteristic of a contextual ethic central to ecological criticism.

Contextual feminist ecological readings are thus precisely what is needed in biblical studies. They need to be multidimensional, not only in relation to the complex interdependence and multiple co-agencies of Earth but also in regarding the multidimensionality of human experiences of ecological trauma. Multidimensional feminist ecological readings recognize the intersections of colonization, ecological damage, empire, racism, sexism, heterosexism, and kyriarchy. This kaleidoscope of experiences extend to other creatures for whom

the lived meaning of climate change has varying connotations—from flourishing, to migration, and even extinction. Thus, feminist biblical scholars must face the challenge of violence against Earth, just as they do violence against indigenous communities and women. A multidimensional approach that takes account of the hegemonic powers of oppression in an ecological sense must become an integral part of feminist ecological interpretation.

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[11] Tamez, "Feminist Biblical Studies in Latin America and the Caribbean," 45.

[12] Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 41–68.

[13] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Changing Horizons*, 160.

[14] See my discussion in Anne Elvey, "Ecological Feminist Hermeneutics," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible and Ecology*, ed. Hilary Marlow and Mark Harris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, in preparation). See Vicky Balabanski, "Ecological Hermeneutics as a Daughter of Feminism: Reflections on the Earth Bible Project," *Women-Church: An Australian Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 40 (2007): 145–49.

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[18] Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (London: SCM, 1984); Susanne Scholz, *Sacred Witness: Rape in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2010).

[19] For example, both the MeToo movement started by Tarana Burke in 2006 and the 2017 #MeToo campaign highlight the pervasiveness of violence against women in contemporary societies. See Me Too movement. https://metoomvmt.org/.

[20] Anne Gardner, "Ecojustice: A Study of Genesis 6.11–13," in *The Earth Story in Genesis*, ed. Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst (Earth Bible 2; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 117–29, esp. 117.

[21] Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Ecology in a Biblical Perspective," chap. in *Studies in Bible and Feminist Criticism* (JPS Scholars of Distinction Series; Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 2006), 357.

[22] Ibid., 357.

[23] Ibid., 360.

[24] Ibid., 357.

[25] Regina M. Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 43.

[26] Ibid., 71.

[27] Ibid., 22.

[28] Ibid., 22–25.

[29] Yvonne Sherwood, “Cutting Up Life: Sacrifice as a Device for Clarifying—and Tormenting—Fundamental Distinctions between Human, Animal, and Divine,” in *The Bible and Posthumanism*, ed. Jennifer L. Koosed (Semeia Studies; Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2014), 247–97.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Athalya Brenner, “Some Reflections on Violence against Women and the Image of the Hebrew God: The Prophetic Books Revisited,” in *On the Cutting Edge: The Study of Women in Biblical Worlds*, ed. Jane Schaberg, Alice Bach, and Esther Fuchs (New York, NY: Continuum, 2004), 69–81, esp. 79.

[32] Ilana Pardes, *The Biography of Ancient Israel: National Narratives in the Bible* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 107–108.

[33] Nãsili Vaka’uta, “Border Crossing / Body Whoring: Rereading Rahab of Jericho with Native Women,” in *Bible, Borders, Belonging(s): Engaging Readings from Oceania*, ed. Jione Havea, David J. Neville, and Elaine M. Wainwright (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2014), 143–55, esp. 153.

[34] Shiju Mathew, “Law, Land, and Gender in the Hebrew Bible: A Postcolonial Womanist Reading,” *Asia Journal of Theology* 30.2 (October 2016): 177–92.

[35] Emily Jane Colgan, “O Land, Land, Land! Images of Land in Jeremiah and in New Zealand Poetry: Ecological Readings from Aotearoa” (Ph.D. thesis, Auckland: University of Auckland, 2014), 85–130.

[36] Wainwright, *Habitat, Human, and Holy*, 19.

[37] Carl Knappett and Lambros Malafouris, eds., *Material Agency: Toward a Non-Anthropocentric Approach* (New York, NY: Springer, 2008); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, eds., *Material Feminisms* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008); Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, eds., *Material Ecocriticism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014).

[38] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 21.

[39] Ibid., 23.

[40] Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London: Routledge, 2003), 183–99.

[41] Ibid., 60.

[42] Ibid., 60; Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 41–68.

[43] Norman Habel, “Geophany: The Earth Story in Genesis 1,” in *The Earth Story in Genesis*, ed. Habel and Wurst, 34–48.

[44] Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 26–32.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid., 121–23.

[47] Catherine Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996), 37. See also Elvey, “Ecological Feminist Hermeneutics.”

[48] Trible, *Texts of Terror*; Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 122.

[49] Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 122.

[50] Gardner, “Ecojustice,” 128; Kate Rigby, *Dancing with Disaster: Environmental Histories, Narratives, and Ethics for Perilous Times* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2015), 16–17; Kate Rigby, “Noah’s Ark Revisited: (Counter-)Utopianism and (Eco-)Catastrophe,” *Arena Journal* 31 (2008): 163–77.

[51] Habel, “Geophany,” 47.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid., 46–47.

[54] Ellen M. Ross, “Human Persons as Images of the Divine,” in *The Pleasure of Her Text: Feminist Readings of Biblical and Historical Texts*, ed. Alice Bach (Philadelphia, PA: Trinity Press International, 1990), 97.

[55] There are numerous other intersectional perspectives on this verse. For instance, A postcolonial reader asks: “What use have colonized peoples for a concept that echoes the conquests of the lands of others?”

[56] Although notably it does not fully undo it.

[57] Ross, “Human Persons as Images of the Divine,” 48.

[58] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ekklēsia-logy of Liberation* (London: SCM, 1993), 228.

[59] The Earth Bible Team, “Six Ecojustice Principles,” in *Readings from the Perspective of Earth*, ed. Habel, 24.

[60] Elaine M. Wainwright, “Images, Words and Stories: Exploring Their Transformative Power in Reading Biblical Texts Ecologically,” *Biblical Interpretation* 20 (2012): 280–304, esp. 299–300, also 293 n. 42; Kate Rigby, “Earth, World, Text: On the (Im)possibility of Ecopoiesis,” *New Literary History* 35.3 (2004), 427–42, esp. 436.

[61] Sun Ai Lee-Park, “The Forbidden Tree and the Year of the Lord,” in *Women Healing Earth*, ed. Ruether, 107–16, at 107.

[62] Ibid., 109.

[63] Ibid., 110–11.

[64] Walker-Jones, “Eden for Cyborgs,” 263, 292–93, 269–79. See also Carol A. Newsom, “Common Ground: An Ecological Reading of Genesis 2–3,” in *The Earth Story in Genesis*, ed. Habel and Wurst, 60–72.

[65] Walker-Jones, “Eden for Cyborgs,” 280.

[66] Ibid., 281.

[67] Ibid., 282.

[68] Ibid., 285–88.

[69] Shirley Wurst, “‘Beloved, Come Back to Me’: Ground’s Theme Song in Genesis 3?,” in *The Earth Story in Genesis*, ed. Habel and Wurst, 87–104.

[70] Ibid., 90–99.

[71] Ibid., 101.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Laura Hobgood-Oster, “‘For out of That Well the Flocks Were Watered’: Stories of Wells in Genesis,” in *The Earth Story in Genesis*, ed. Habel and Wurst, 187–99.

[74] Carole R. Fontaine, “Forgotten Voices of Earth: The Blessing of Subjects in Genesis 49,” in *The Earth Story in Genesis*, ed. Habel and Wurst, 200–10. Fontaine avoids idealizing ancient “nature” religions.

[75] Ibid., 209.

[76] Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press, 2009), 31.

[77] Shirley Wurst, "Woman Wisdom's Way: Ecokinship," in *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions*, ed. Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst (The Earth Bible 3; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 48–64; Carole R. Fontaine, "'Go Forth into the Fields': An Earth-Centred Reading of the Song of Songs," *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions*, ed. Habel and Wurst, 126–42; Katharine J. Dell, *Interpreting Ecclesiastes: Readers Old and New* (Critical Studies in the Hebrew Bible 3; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 59–67.

[78] Norman Habel, *Discerning Wisdom in God's Creation: Following the Way of Ancient Scientists* (Northcote, VIC: Morningstar Publishing, 2015).

[79] Laura Hobgood-Oster, "Wisdom Literature and Ecofeminism," in *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions*, ed. Habel and Wurst, 35–47.

[80] Ibid., 25–28.

[81] See, e.g., Melissa Tubbs Loya, "'Therefore the Earth Mourns': The Grievance of Earth in Hosea 4:1–3," in *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*, ed. Habel and Trudinger, 53–62, esp. 58.

[82] Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (second ed., Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001).

[83] Jan Morgan, *Earth's Cry: Prophetic Ministry in a More-than-human World* (Preston, VIC: Uniting Academic Press, 2013).

[84] For instance, feminist environmental historian, Carolyn Merchant, criticizes the narrative of Eve (Genesis 2–3) in counterpoint with Native American traditions. Whereas the Native American story moves from "desert" to "garden," the biblical narrative moves from "garden" to "desert" with deteriorating consequences for the first human couple. Merchant's critique of European colonialism intersects with her feminist and ecological analyses. Hers is a promising example for future feminist ecological work yet to emerge. See Merchant, *Earthcare*, 27–56.

[85] Judith E. McKinlay, "Slipping across Borders and Bordering on Conquest: A Contrapuntal Reading of Numbers 13," in *Bible, Borders, Belonging(s)*, ed. Havea, Neville, and Wainwright, 125–42, at 139. See also Judith E. McKinlay, "Braiding the Traditions in Aotearoa/New Zealand," in *The Future of the Biblical Past: Envisioning Biblical Studies on a Global Key*, ed. Roland Boer and Fernando F. Segovia (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2012), 207–21.

CHAPTER 35

HAGAR AND SARAH IN ART AND INTERFAITH DIALOG

AARON ROSEN

MATRIARCHS' lives matter. Today this could easily be a meme, with Internet trolls angrily hammering back: "All ancestors matter!" Feminist scholars of religion, however, have been persuasively making the case for re-examining, re-imagining, and re-valuing the lives of scriptural women for at least half a century. Perhaps no figures have been the focus of more attention than Sarah and Hagar who have been treated at length by such scholarly matriarchs as Rachel Adler, Tikva Frymer-Kensky, Phyllis Trible, or Amina Wadud. And yet, despite this sustained examination, when it comes to the study and practice of interfaith dialog, the figure of Abraham still looms pre-eminently over his wives Sarah and Hagar.

This tendency is particularly noticeable at an institutional level. Numerous interfaith organizations have taken Abraham as a figurehead, including the Abraham Fund in Israel, Abraham's Vision in the United States, and Abraham House in the United Kingdom, while Bruce Feiler's bestseller, *Abraham: A Journey to the Heart of Three Faiths*, launched "Abraham salon" discussion groups around the world.[1] Universities have participated in this trend, exemplified by the recent endowment of chaired professorships in "The Study of the Abrahamic Religions" and "Abrahamic Faiths and Shared Values" at Oxford and Cambridge respectively. This proliferation of Abrahamic endeavors has, by and large, been a boon to interfaith dialog and academic study. However, the more attention the "Abrahamic" has garnered—the more it has solidified its place within academic, political, and charitable sectors—the less attentive we

have become to what this label ignores and obscures.

Repainting the Abrahamic family portrait, with Hagar and Sarah front and center, presents an opportunity to engage in a more complicated, challenging—and ultimately more enriching—dialog between Jews, Christians, and Muslims. To be truly effective, interfaith dialog needs to situate religious diversity within a wide matrix of difference. It needs to take into account the challenges of gender and sexuality, alongside the intersecting issues of class, culture, and ethnicity. The stories and reception histories of Sarah and Hagar introduce these tangled issues in abundance, in ways that are remarkably relevant in the twenty-first century. Today, for instance, Hagar and Ishmael's expulsion from the tents of Abraham calls to mind the harrowing experiences of émigrés, especially those fleeing the calamitous conflict in Syria. Biblical scholars, such as Casey Strine, have begun to apply insights from refugee studies to scripture. Going forward, it will be interesting to see how such perspectives, especially concerning women's experiences, shape our understanding of Hagar's exile. Where interfaith dialog often presumes participants on an equal footing, in a relatively privileged position to articulate their concerns, Hagar challenges us to listen to the voice of the subaltern.

In the United States, retrogressive attacks on women's reproductive rights have cast the themes of infertility and forced sex that run through these biblical sequences in a disturbing light. The dystopian America imagined by Margaret Atwood in *The Handmaid's Tale*, in which a theocratic regime revives the practice of coerced surrogacy of Hagar (and later Bilhah), seems less fictional by the day.[2] Even if we manage to set aside the methods by which Abraham procures his offspring, the narrative still presents a deeply problematic construction of paternity. As Carol Delaney explains, the notion of paternity as "*the primary*, *creative*, *engendering* role" in procreation is powerfully symbolized by the recurring use of the word "seed" in the Abraham story.[3] According to this metaphor, women are the passive soil into which the Abrahamic germ is planted. They are denied a creative role in their children's identity, as well as the right to make decisions about their well-being, a fact made painfully clear in the binding of Isaac. Any attempt to frame an Abrahamic dialog around the putative bond of a shared male ancestor must reckon with the debilitating chauvinism that this genealogical formula builds into itself from the start.

Yet calling for a dialog built around the stories of Sarah and Hagar is hardly less thorny. Amina Wadud notes that multi-faith initiatives "focused on women as daughters of Sarah and Hagar" have helped forge relationships between

female Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scholars but the "Sarah-Hagar paradigm" has tended to bake in dubious preconceptions, particularly regarding Islam.[4] For one, it "privileged Judaism and Christianity by presuming that the stories of Hagar were taken from the Old Testament / Hebrew Bible."[5] As a result, not only are Islamic narratives and traditions relegated to a derivative status, Islamic feminists are unfairly tasked with carrying the hefty baggage packed into original texts to which they lay no claim. Moreover, it is important to acknowledge the different hermeneutics at play in how contemporary Jews, Christians, and Muslims read their sacred texts, and how they interpret subsequent traditions. While feminist theologians in these respective traditions share certain aims, their strategies are often significantly different. This is especially true, as Aysha Hidayatullah notes, when it comes to Islamic exegesis:

> [S]cholars of feminist *tafsir* [interpretation] often seek to distance the Qur'an from certain biblical interpretations of parallel stories and statements … . Because they regard the entire Qur'an as divine and authentic, they do not dispute the text in the manner that many Jewish and Christian feminist theologians do.[6]

This theological gulf is compounded by cultural rifts. As Qudsia Mirza,[7] Hidayatullah,[8] and others note, colonial expansion often justified itself by promising to emancipate women from the purportedly backward and repressive ideology of Islam. As a result, Muslim feminists have had to contend with accusations that their exegetical efforts represent a dubious embrace of Western values, liable to further neo-colonial agendas. In a postcolonial context, the joining of hands with Jewish and Christian feminists in a "Sarah-Hagar paradigm" might at times be counterproductive for Muslim feminists, as Hidayatullah states.[9]

This, then, is a taste of the complicated situation in which we find ourselves when we engage in interreligious dialog centered on Sarah and Hagar. It is not to say that such a dialog is not worth having. Quite the contrary. It is rather to insist that we do not trade the obfuscations of the Abrahamic for an equally simplistic matriarchal model. We must make a strength of the diversity represented by a story about two mothers, at two different stages of life, in two divergent positions in society, from two conflicting cultures. In order to assist us in this endeavor, I review the stories of Hagar and Sarah as they appear in the texts and traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. I pay special attention to the tensions within and between these traditions, especially from a feminist perspective. In the final section, I open up this conversation even further through the use of visual art. By providing embodied visions of the characters in

question, these works of sculpture, photography, and painting force us to examine preconceptions and possibilities for dialog otherwise left implicit or ambiguous.

Textual Traditions

The Hebrew Bible sets the stage for a soap opera.[10] When Abraham and Sarah enter Egypt to escape a famine, he beseeches her to say she is his sister, "so that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared" (Gen. 12:13).[11] This wheedling fits a wider pattern of "denial and subsequent reaffirmation of family ties," which complicates both the story of Abraham, and the prospects for 'Abrahamic' dialog.[12] The pattern intensifies with the appearance of Hagar. Frustrated by her barrenness, Sarah "*took* Hagar the Egyptian, her slave-girl, and *gave* her to her husband Abram as a wife" (Gen. 16:3)[13] in order to "obtain children by her" (Gen. 16:2).[14] Mentioned several times, Hagar's foreignness emphasizes her potential untrustworthiness. After conceiving quickly, in sharp distinction to Sarah, Hagar "looked with contempt on her mistress" (Gen. 16:4). As Frymer-Kensky explains: "Something unanticipated happens. Hagar, who was supposed to be a neutral body being passed from Sarai to Abram, reacts. This 'womb with legs' is a person with her own viewpoint."[15] After her mistress "dealt harshly" with her (Gen. 16:6), Hagar flees to the wilderness. In an unnerving inversion of the Exodus story, the angel of the Lord appears to the Egyptian slave and orders her back to bondage under her Hebrew master, further confounding any easy models of "Abrahamic" unity.[16] Before Hagar departs, the angel announces the birth of Ishmael and the promise of innumerable descendants through him (Gen. 16:10),[17] planting the seed for later exegetes to connect Ishmael to the Prophet Muhammad. Hagar responds to this blessing by "nam[ing] YHWH who spoke to her" (Gen. 16:13); an extraordinary act of daring and devotion. This remarkable interaction, in which Hagar becomes the first woman to receive an annunciation, and the only figure in the Hebrew Bible to *name* the Divine, has been a cause for consternation among some ancient male commentators,[18] and for celebration among many feminists.[19]

Sarah has her own encounter with the Divine a couple of chapters later. Three mysterious visitors arrive at the family's encampment by the oaks of Mamre (Gen. 18:1–2). While the guests sit down to eat, Sarah hears them tell Abraham

that his wife will bear a son, which leads her to chuckle: “After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?” (Gen. 18:12). As Rachel Adler writes, male commentators have historically missed at least half the point of this saucy passage, ignoring Sarah’s astonishment at the prospect of having sex![20] Sarah does indeed conceive, but as her son Isaac grows up, trouble brews anew with Hagar. Sarah sees “the son of Hagar the Egyptian … playing with her son Isaac” (Gen. 21:9).[21] While the Hebrew text need not imply anything more than laughing or rough-housing,[22] Sarah instructs Abraham: “Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac” (Gen. 21:10). Notably, Sarah and Hagar never speak directly in the biblical text, only through their husband.[23] For all their shared struggles with their God-haunted husband, sisterhood hardly abounds.[24] On divine counsel, Abraham yields to Sarah and sends Hagar packing. For the second time, Hagar is cast out; one among many duplications which occur in the Abraham-Sarah-Hagar sequence.[25]

Hagar’s meagre supplies soon fail and she fears for her son’s life. Placing Ishmael under a bush, an act variously interpreted as everything from callous abandonment to the tender preparation of a “deathbed,”[26] Hagar begs God not to let her “look on the death of the child” (Gen. 21:16). In reply, God promises to make “a great nation” of her son, and discloses a well that revives mother and child (Gen. 21:18–19). While God does not deliver them from exile, he nonetheless demonstrates an abiding concern for the survival of Hagar and Ishmael.[27] The story closes by informing us that “God was with the boy” as he grew up (Gen. 21:20). Finally, in an affirmation of Hagar’s otherness, so often a factor in her mistreatment, we learn that “[Ishmael’s] mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt,” her homeland (Gen. 21:21). In a sense, Hagar as the consummate outsider provides an archetype for the biblical Israel, destined to experience slavery before freedom and suffering before the reward.[28] The Hebrew Bible relates no further information about Hagar, and indeed little more about Sarah, except to record her death (Gen. 23:1–2).[29] Despite their obvious enmity, both women are most alive in the biblical text at those moments when their stories intersect, lending them a fraught but powerful connection. While it seems a stretch to follow feminist exegetes who cast one or both as priestesses,[30] they nonetheless stand out as two of the most fully sketched female figures in the Hebrew Bible.[31] And Sarah, in particular, has come to occupy an increasingly visible place in modern Judaism. She is included in the Amidah by Reform Jews[32] and appears in feminist meditations[33] and midrashim[34] as well as in

reflections on “feminine spirituality.”[35]

Sarah and Hagar’s destinies are also entwined in the New Testament. While Sarah is praised for her miraculous pregnancy (Rom. 4:19, 9:9; Heb. 11:11) and —rather ironically—her obedience to her husband (1 Pet. 3:6), she receives her fullest treatment in conjunction with Hagar. In his Letter to the Galatians, Paul upbraids Galatia’s fledgling Christian community for taking up Jewish observance, which he regards as a profound and dangerous theological error. Turning the Galatians’ apparent thirst for the law on its head, Paul utilizes the Old Testament to make his case. In Gal 4:22–26 and 4:30–31, he writes:

> [I]t is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and the other by a free woman. One, the child of the slave, was born according to the flesh; the other, the child of the free woman, was born through the promise. Now this is an allegory: these women are two covenants. One woman, in fact, is Hagar, from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery … and corresponds to the present Jerusalem … . But the other woman corresponds to the Jerusalem above; she is free, and she is our mother … . [W]hat does the scripture say? “Drive out the slave and her child; for the child of the slave will not share the inheritance with the child of the free woman.” So then, friends, we are children, not of the slave but of the free woman.

Paul’s argument has concerned modern commentators on several levels. The binary Paul establishes between “slave woman” and “free woman” risks betraying his own radically egalitarian terminology. Just a chapter earlier, he insists: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). As Daniel Boyarin reminds us, such universalism has its own troubling legacy, “equat[ing] equality with sameness” in a way that leaves little room, for instance, for the particularity of women’s experiences.[36] If Paul’s universalism opens the back door to discrimination, the allegory of Sarah and Hagar flings open the front. Read in its original context, Paul’s allegory is directed against gentile Christians seeking justification by law instead of faith. Yet from the Patristic period onward, Hagar’s children were frequently associated with Jews and eventually Muslims. Unsurprisingly, Galatians 4 also became a popular proof text for *intra*-faith polemics. For instance, Augustine correlates the children of Hagar with the heretical Donatists, and Calvin pairs them with Roman Catholics. Given this history, the central challenge for many modern interpreters, including artists, has been not merely to ransom Hagar from servitude in the Hebrew Bible, but to free her from the equally weighty chains of New Testament allegory.

Abraham (Ibrahim) appears frequently in the Qur’an, with the story of his hospitality a recurring episode. In one telling, Abraham’s wife, presumably

Sarah although not named here, giggles at the news that she will become pregnant (11:71–73). Another surah adds that she strikes her forehead in disbelief (51:29).[37] While the Qur'an makes no mention of Hagar (Hajar) she plays an important role in the *hadith*, which report the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad. Echoing post-biblical Jewish legends, a local despot gives Hagar to Abraham in compensation for keeping Sarah in his clutches.[38] The *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, one of the most authoritative collections of *hadith* for Sunni Muslims, alludes to tension between Sarah and Hagar.[39] However, Sarah's jealousy is not the primary cause of Hagar's departure. Rather than exiling Hagar and Ishmael, as reported in the Bible, Abraham brings mother and son to Mecca in order to establish proper worship in the area. Still, Mecca is no picnic. As Abraham prepares to head back, "Ishmael's mother followed him saying, 'O Abraham! Where are you going, leaving us in this valley … ?'"[40] Frustrated by his silence, she asks, "Has Allah ordered you to do so?" When he responds affirmatively, Hagar accepts her fate, pronouncing stoically, "Then He will not neglect us."[41]

Soon, however, Hagar's supplies run low, and she dashes between the hills of Safa and Marwa in search of water until she glimpses an angel digging a well.[42] Hagar's quest is commemorated in one of the central rituals of the Hajj, in which pilgrims drink from the well at Zam-zam and file between Safa and Marwa seven times. For many feminists, Hagar's travels are a symbol of female resourcefulness and independence. Azizah Y. al-Hibri, for instance, writes movingly of the inspiration she drew from Hagar during her early years as an immigrant to America.[43] According to Islamic tradition, Hagar goes on to flourish in Mecca, where she and Ishmael receive periodic visits from Abraham.[44] When he reaches maturity, Ishmael takes a wife from a local Arab tribe, beginning a line of descent that stretches to Muhammad. Yet what is missing from traditional interpretations, according to Wadud, is an explicit acknowledgment of Hagar's role as a single mother. Wadud observes: "Her status as single head of household is never commented upon, no one was held accountable for its resolution, and later legal codifications in Islam would still overlook it."[45] The dominant image of the "ideal" Islamic family, Wadud argues, neglects single African-American mothers and other "modern-day Hajars."[46] If on the one hand Islam celebrates Hagar as a pious pioneer, feminist interpreters call for greater attention to her domestic, social, and political leadership on the other hand.[47] Interfaith dialog must consider not only the complex relationship between a single Sarah and Hagar but the *multiple* Sarahs and Hagars present within Islam, Judaism, and Christianity.

Artistic Traditions

While images of Sarah and Hagar appear in works of art from all three traditions, Christian artists seized upon the uneasy love triangle between Abraham and his wives with particular gusto. A bronze panel from the twelfth-century doors of San Zeno in Verona, Italy, makes explicit the awkward situation of the characters. Abraham points aggressively at Hagar, frozen at the threshold of their dwelling, while Sarah spies on the scene from inside the house. The same panel includes a scene of Abraham receiving the angels, laying bare the tension between Genesis 18 and 21, between welcome and expulsion, hospitality and disregard. Some medieval artists even seem to delight in the humiliation of Hagar, as in the fourteenth-century *Egerton Genesis*, which depicts Sarah beating Hagar with a long pole.[48] During the early modern period, the relationship between Sarah and Hagar became a common theme in both painting and printmaking, with works by masters such as Lucas van Leyden, Peter Paul Rubens, Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, Rembrandt, and Claude Lorrain. As Christine Sellin explains, the theme became wildly popular among Dutch artists in the seventeenth century, who, for a variety of social, national, and theological reasons, "treated her with an unprecedented degree of sympathy, mercy, and dignity."[49] This rehabilitation of Hagar paved the way for positive portrayals by a range of modern artists from various religious and cultural backgrounds, including Camille Corot, Jean François Millet, Max Pechstein, Karl Knappe, Jacques Lipchitz, Marc Chagall, and Sliman Mansour. I want to look closely at four artists, Edmonia Lewis, George Segal, Adi Nes, and Siona Benjamin, who help us rethink our approach not only to Hagar and Sarah but also to wider questions of interfaith dialog.

Beginning in her own lifetime, Edmonia Lewis's (1843–1909/11) sculptures have consistently been analyzed in terms of the artist's race, as the daughter of a Chippewa mother and an African-American father. On the one hand, many of Lewis's works explicitly invite these interpretations, from her sculpture of liberated slaves in *Forever Free* (1867) to the *Old Indian Arrowmaker and His Daughter* (1872). On the other hand, Lewis's decision to depict figures with idealized Western European features may have been an attempt to stymie reductively autobiographical readings.[50] This process of "invok[ing] and invert[ing] autobiography" is especially evident in Lewis's 1875 marble *Hagar in the Wilderness* (Figure 35.1).[51] In this work, Lewis taps into a long history of African-American women who have identified with Hagar.[52] Lewis's depiction

of Hagar in flight specifically calls to mind the oppressive Fugitive Slave Law passed in 1850, which obligated all citizens to aid in the arrest of suspected runaway slaves (a law with eerie reverberations today considering Donald Trump's pronouncements regarding undocumented immigrants). At the same time, the figure of Hagar in the wilderness may have struck a more positive chord with Lewis's Native American heritage. The artist once remarked: "Mother often left her home, and wandered with her people whose habits she could not forget, and thus we her children were brought up in the same wild manner."[53] Colored by the sculptor's dual heritage, Lewis's Hagar thus evokes associations of both slavery and freedom. The sculpture's neo-classical idiom, and normatively "neutral" physiognomy,[54] allows it to signal these multiple identities and meanings without taking on the more limiting connotations of self-portraiture. With few identifying features, and only an empty jug of water for narrative detail, Lewis's *Hagar* hovers ambivalently between universalism and particularity. If there is an allegory here, it is not the one Paul prefers to tell. Instead it is closer to Boyarin's emendation: "the claims of difference and the desire for universality are both—contradictorily—necessary; both are also equally problematic."[55] It is this dynamic tension which interfaith dialog demands.

FIGURE 35.1 Edmonia Lewis. *Hagar in the Wilderness.* 1875. Carved marble. 52 5/8 × 15 1/4 × 17 1/8 inches. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C. Gift of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.

Where Lewis created figures that flirted with the universal, the Jewish sculptor George Segal (1924–2000) amplified their uniqueness. Segal set out, in his words, "to apprehend two realities, one high, quasi-religious, and the other low, made up of the banal and unpretentious."[56] In *Abraham's Farewell to Ishmael* (1987; Figure 35.2), Segal does away with the trappings of monumentality that often accompany biblical subjects. Rather than resting on a pedestal—physically or otherwise—Segal's matriarchs and patriarchs have their feet planted firmly on the ground. Instead of being chiseled to perfection, they are cast from life using Segal's signature method, in which he wrapped his models in wet plaster and then reassembled their forms piece by piece. The process was sloppy, imprecise, and time-consuming, involving an extraordinary intimacy between sculptor and model.[57] "The discomfort of the person is of such a nature that they can't pretend with me," Segal explains, "they have to relax, and they're just as stoic and brave, or screaming and hysterical as they really are."[58] As Segal notes, the Hebrew Bible has "few adjectives that give clues to

the interior feelings of any character,"[59] and so his models' responses to the embalming process, as well as their personal histories, have a profound capacity to flesh out the scriptural characters. In this case, Segal chose for his models a family he knew who were preparing to send their son away to university.[60] This relationship between the figures gives the scene a sense of tenderness and introspection only hinted at in the biblical narrative. This is, as Segal's title suggests, a "farewell" rather than an expulsion, and there is a sense that it is the grown son—setting off to pursue his own destiny—who must comfort his father. Where the biblical Abraham sends Hagar and Ishmael on their way "early in the morning" (Gen. 21:14), Segal's lingering goodbye stretches out this moment long enough for us to explore the emotions of each character: from Sarah peering on jealously from behind a rock to the shivering Hagar who seems to require our warming embrace. Segal invites us to use our bodies to approach the biblical narrative from positions that are frequently rejected or ignored, beginning with Hagar.[61] Yet Segal's *Farewell* not only sensitizes us to the plight of individuals. It speaks to the difficult relationship between *faiths*, sometimes parting in love, other times in resentment. In this model, interfaith dialog becomes, at its most basic level, a problem of proxemics, the distance between us. And none stand further apart than Sarah and Hagar.

FIGURE 35.2 George Segal. *Abraham's Farewell to Ishmael*. 1987. Painted plaster. 107 × 54 × 54 inches. © Miami Art Museum. Gift of the George and Helen Segal Foundation, Inc. Photograph by Allan Finkelman.

For the Israeli photographer Adi Nes (b. 1966), the question of what we see, and especially what we are *conditioned* to see, is inextricably political. In his recent series, *Bible Stories*, Nes stages photographs that evoke well-known images with reference points ranging from Old Masters to Zionist posters. Using models dressed as homeless people, he freezes biblical protagonists at the most vulnerable and compromised moments of their respective narratives. A nude Noah, for instance, lies passed out on the pavement, while Esau sells Jacob his birthright in a soup kitchen. For *Hagar* (2006; Figure 35.3), Nes takes inspiration from Dorothea Lange's photograph *Migrant Mother* (1936), which became an iconic image of poverty and determination during the Great Depression. The strong echoes of Lange's photograph, in which the mother's children huddle against her, makes the absence of Ishmael in Nes's image all the more acute. We are left to wonder whether the woman has set her child down out of grief (Gen. 21:16) or whether she runs for water, as she does in the *hadith*. Maybe, more ominously, the child has been taken from her. Perhaps we should turn the clock back further and ask how this bedraggled Hagar came to rest on these dirty steps in the first place. Given the long association of Hagar with Islam, it may be religious or ethnic intolerance which has driven this woman to the margins of society, whether as an Israeli Arab or as a Palestinian. "Bible Stories," as Nes knows, are never just that. The tales we grow up with, internalize, and repeat to our children—whether about Abraham and Hagar or Ibrahim and Hajar—can feed our baser instincts just as easily as they can suppress them. In the end, what makes us children of Abraham is not just our willingness to welcome strangers within our tents, but—more frighteningly—our tendency to disregard those who dwell among us.

FIGURE 35.3 Adi Nes. *Hagar*. 2006. Photographic c-print.

© Adi Nes. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

If our religious texts are capable of reinforcing and legitimizing our prejudices, it is worth recalling that they may also be victims themselves, swept up in an exegetical maelstrom beyond their control. In Siona Benjamin's (b. 1960) *Hagar and Sarah* (2001; Figure 35.4), the two matriarchs cling to one another for comfort, besieged on either side by soldiers and suicide bombers. While the two women—Sarah in *yarmulke* and *tefillin* and Hagar in *hijab*[62]—appear to have forged an unlikely sisterhood, their descendants seem determined to kill one another in the name of these matriarchs, whether they sanction it or not. Caught in the crossfire, Sarah and Hagar's conjoined bodies have already begun to break into glassy shards, separated by drops of blood. On the one hand, their pale, cloud-blue skin highlights their vulnerability in this otherwise molten picture. Yet this pigmentation is also empowering, calling to mind the cerulean skin of the Hindu deities Krishna and Vishnu. For Benjamin, these associations evoke her Indian heritage, born and raised as part of the Bene Israel Jewish community in Mumbai. Since adopting her signature figurative style in the 1990s, Benjamin has used this blue hue as a mode of self-portraiture, signifying her identity as a "Jewish woman of color"; a distinction she felt even more keenly upon immigrating to the United States.[63] While Benjamin has turned to the Hebrew Bible and midrash to make sense of her doubly diasporic condition —a minority within a minority—she has found the greatest affinity not with the heroines of Judaism but with the figures it marginalizes, from Lilith to Vashti.

Seen in this light, Benjamin's sympathies in this image lie as much with the Muslim Hagar—whom she depicts majestically in *niqab* in a related work—as the Jewish Sarah. If anything, Benjamin denies the logic that demands we choose one mother, one narrative, or one perspective. The artist seems to have no illusions about the difficulty of claiming such a divergent heritage. However, the blood which pools at the base of Sarah's and Hagar's feet is not only that, it may also be ink. Together, their bodies fused into the form of a fountain pen, Hagar and Sarah seem to be illuminating a new manuscript; one which refuses to be read as a pretext for intolerance.

FIGURE 35.4 Siona Benjamin. *Hagar and Sarah*. 2001. Gouache on paper.

© Siona Benjamin. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

CONCLUSION

It is fitting that we should conclude with Benjamin's painting, an image inviting us to consider how we write our religious genealogies and whom we write out of them, whether knowingly or not. At a time when exclusionary language is spiking dangerously—and imprecise shibboleths such as "radical Islam" abound

—it is important not to damn efforts at inclusion for their good intentions. But we need to be alert how even ecumenical language, such as the "Abrahamic," concretizes hierarchies and divisions. Feminist interpretations—by both men and women—are more essential than ever as we read and re-imagine the texts of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in search of new trajectories for dialog. It is time to take the traditional picture of our "Our Father Abraham"[64] down from the mantle, and to work instead towards a more inclusive image. If Abraham might look askance on such endeavors, perhaps Hagar and Sarah would see things differently. The poet Eleanor Wilner imagines Sarah asking Isaac to run away with her on the eve of the Akedah, to join Hagar and Ishmael in exile, far away from Abraham:

> "But Ishmael," said Isaac, "How should I greet him?" "As you greet yourself," she said, "when you bend over the well to draw water and see your image, not knowing it reversed. You must know your brother now, or you will see your own face looking back the day you're at each other's throats."[65]

The act of looking, as Sarah intuitively understands, is not merely incidental to dialog, it is at its very heart. For Isaac and Ishmael—and their latter day descendants—the consequences of dis-regarding the Other can be fatal. Art may not be able to present us with a portrait of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar that we can all agree upon, but it can help train us to see difference in a new light; an urgent task for both feminist scholarship and interfaith dialog.

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[1] Bruce Feiler, *Abraham: A Journey to the Heart of Three Faiths* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2002). For information on salons, see at http://www.brucefeiler.com/images/salon_kit.pdf [accessed February 1, 2017].

[2] Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (London: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006).

[3] Carol Delaney, *Abraham on Trial: The Social Legacy of Biblical Myth* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 7. Italics in the original.

[4] Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2013), 208–209.

[5] Ibid., 209.

[6] Aysha Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 59.

[7] Qudsia Mirza, "Law, Justice, and Gender Equality in Islamic Feminism," *God Loves Diversity and Justice: Progressive Scholars Speak about Faith, Politics, and the World*, ed. Susanne Scholz (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013), 187–88.

[8] Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges*, 2, 60–62.

[9] Ibid., 62.

[10] Portions from the ensuing sections appeared in earlier form in the following article, for which I gratefully acknowledge the publisher's permission: "Changing the Family Portrait: Hagar and Sarah in Modern Art and Interfaith Dialogue," *Intertwined Worlds* (Religion Compass; Chicester: Wiley-Blackwell) 7.5 (May 2013): 1–11.

[11] Trible pulls no punches, denouncing these as the words of a "wimp and [a] pimp"; see Phyllis Trible, "Ominous Beginnings for a Promise of Blessing," *Hagar, Sarah, and their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives*, ed. Phyllis Trible and Letty M. Russell (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 59. Note that all biblical quotations in this essay are from the New Revised Standard Version.

[12] Henry Hanoch Abramovitch, *The First Father Abraham: The Psychology and Culture of a Spiritual Revolutionary* (Seattle, WA: Libertary, 2010), 78.

[13] Italics added. The diction here echoes the Eden story, in which Eve "took" and "gave" to Adam (Gen. 3:6), prompting the reader to identify Hagar as a forbidden, foreign fruit; see Trible, "Ominous Beginnings," 38–39.

[14] This fits with what is known from archaeological evidence of ancient Near Eastern practices in cases of prolonged infertility, and is attested in the laws of Hammurabi; see Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible: A New Interpretation of their Stories* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 2002), 227.

[15] Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, 228.

[16] Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1984), 16. The irony is increased if we follow the midrashic tradition by which Hagar was herself actually a daughter of a pharaoh; see Amy-Jill Levine, "Settling at Beer-lahai-roi," *Daughters of Abraham: Feminist Thought in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. Yvonne Haddad and John Esposito (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2001), 20. Levine also finds a "mirror image" between Hagar's position in Abraham's household and Sarah's brief tenure in Pharaoh's harem in Gen. 12:15; see Levine, "Settling at Beer-lahai-roi," 20.

[17] Michal Shekel sees a parallel between Hagar's journey and God's promise to her with Abraham's migrations and divine assurances; see Michal Shekel, "Lech Lecha: What's in a Name?," in *The Women's Torah Commentary*, ed. Rabbi Elyse Goldstein (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2008), 58–59.

[18] Genesis Rabbah prefers to claim that Hagar mistook her encounter with an angel for the Divine, who could hardly be expected to lower himself to engage directly with a woman, save the highly exceptional case of Sarah; see Gen Rabbah 45:10.

[19] Shekel, "Lech Lecha," 59. See Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 18.

[20] Rachel Adler, *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1999), 106. Adler explains: "The word *ednah* [pleasure] is from the same root as the word Eden. It means not simply pleasure, but physical pleasure, erotic pleasure. 'So the old man and I are going to do it again!' she thinks to herself. And the picture of their fragile old bodies shaken by fierce young pleasures evokes from her a bawdy and delighted guffaw" (105). Adler observes perceptively: "To construct a feminist Jewish theology/ethics of sexuality, we must return to that original miscommunication and retrieve the meaning of Sarah's laughter" (106).

[21] As many commentators note, the Hebrew word *mitzacheq*, or playing, is related to the name Yitzhak (Isaac), and it could suggest that the real problem for Sarah is observing Ishmael acting *as if* he is Isaac, worthy of his name and status (Levine, 24).

[22] Ancient Jewish commentators, anxious to exonerate Sarah for her apparent pettiness, interpret his child's play as idolatry or possibly even bloodshed; see David J. Zucker, "Sarah: The View of the Classical Rabbis," *Perspectives on Our Father Abraham: Essays in Honor of Marvin R. Wilson*, ed. Steven A. Hunt (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010) 243.

[23] Levine, "Settling at Beer-lahai-roi," 21.

[24] In her midrash imagining Sarah spotting Abraham after he attempted to sacrifice Isaac, Ellen Umansky writes: "[Sarah] was tired of hearing Abraham's excuses and even more tired of hearing what *he* thought God demanded. And so Sarah turned and went inside and prayed that if only for one night, Abraham would leave her alone"; see Ellen Umansky, "Re-Visioning Sarah: A Midrash on Genesis 22," in *Four Centuries of Jewish Women's Spirituality: A Sourcebook*, ed. Ellen Umansky and Dianne Ashton (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2009), 319. One could imagine Hagar thinking exactly the same thing before her expulsion!

[25] Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible: A New Interpretation of their Stories* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 2002), 225. At a source-critical level, we owe Genesis 16 to the Yahwhist while Genesis 21 belongs to the Elohist. Jo Ann Hackett fleshes out this parallel by comparing the doublet to other pairings in Near Eastern sources; see Jo Ann Hackett, "Rehabilitating Hagar: Fragments of an Epic Pattern," *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy L. Day (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1989), 12.

[26] Trible, "Ominous Beginnings," 48.

[27] Delores S. Williams, "Hagar in African American Biblical Appropriation," in *Hagar, Sarah, and their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives*, ed. Phyllis Trible and Letty M. Russell (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 177; Letty M. Russell, "Children of Struggle," in *Hagar, Sarah, and their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives*, ed. Phyllis Trible and Letty M. Russell (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 195.

[28] Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women in the Bible*, 233, 237.

[29] Noticing the fact that the report of Sarah's death immediately follows the story of the akedah, several midrashim, such as Tanhuma Vayera 23, offer accounts whereby Sarah dies upon hearing (in some versions from Satan) that her husband has attempted to sacrifice their son.

[30] See, e.g., Savina Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess: The First Matriarch of Genesis* (Athens, OH: Swallow Press, 1984); Savina Teubal, *Hagar the Egyptian: The Lost Tradition of the Matriarchs* (New York, NY:

HarperCollins, 1990). As tendentious as the notion of Sarah as a priestess figure might be from an historical perspective, the image of an oracular biblical matriarch has proven a powerful literary motif; see, e.g., Anita Diamant, *The Red Tent* (New York, NY: Picador, 1997) 102, 114.

[31] It is worth keeping in mind, however, the critique offered by Athalya Brenner-Idan, for whom Sarah "essentially follows a stereotyped depiction of the Hero's Mother"; see Athalya Brenner-Idan, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* (second ed.; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 88. Sharon Pace Jeansonne presents a rather more optimistic appraisal. While she acknowledges how the narrator's worldview places limitations on what constitute women's activities, she emphasizes the dynamic role which Sarah and her successors play "as participants in the struggles for justice and self-identity as Israel defines itself in the context of its neighbors"; see Sharon Pace Jeansonne, *The Women of Genesis: From Sarah to Potiphar's Wife* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 117.

[32] Chaim Stern ed., *Gates of Prayer: For Shabbat and Weekdays* (Gender Sensitive edn; New York, NY: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1994), 114.

[33] Susan Grossman has composed a meditation that she recites as she winds the final straps of the tefillin around her hand: "'May you imbue me with wisdom,' as you filled Sarah with wisdom, for she was your prophetess with whom you did speak';" see Susan Grossman, "On Tefillin," in *Four Centuries of Jewish Women's Spirituality: A Sourcebook*, ed. Ellen Umansky and Dianne Ashton (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2009), 248.

[34] See, e.g. Ellen Umansky, "Re-Visioning Sarah," 319.

[35] Tamar Frankiel, *The Voice of Sarah: Feminine Spirituality and Traditional Judaism* (New York, NY: Biblio Press, 1990).

[36] Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 9.

[37] The Hebraic wordplay in the name Isaac ("he laughed") is not present in the Arabic, leading Muslim commentators to postulate various reasons for Sarah's action; see Reuven Firestone, "Abraham," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān (Vol. 1: A–D)*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 5–11.

[38] Riffat Hassan, "Islamic Hagar and Her Family," in *Hagar, Sarah, and their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives*, ed. Phyllis Trible and Letty M. Russell (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 151.

[39] Ibid., 152.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid., 152–53.

[43] She writes: "I would feel Hagar touching my shoulder, softly whispering: 'You are an immigrant now, like me. You are all alone in this distant desert. Wipe up your tears. Get up and do your own *sa'i*. Run between these strange hills. In the end, God will be with you.' Hagar was right, and this immigrant never gave up"; see Azizah Y. al-Hibri, "Hagar on My Mind," in *Philosophy, Feminism, and Faith*, ed. Ruth Groenhout and Marya Bower (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), 199.

[44] Hassan, "Islamic Hagar," 154.

[45] Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2013), 243.

[46] Ibid., 245, 264.

[47] Hibba Abugideiri, "Hagar: A Historical Model for 'Gender Jihad,'" in *Daughters of Abraham: Feminist Thought in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. Yvonne Haddad and John Esposito (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2001), 87–107.

[48] Ruth Mellinkoff, "Sarah and Hagar: Laughter and Tears," in *Illuminating the Book: Makers and Interpreters: Essays in Honour of Janet Backhouse*, ed. Michelle Brown and Scot McKendrick (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 42.

[49] Christine Petra Sellin, *Fractured Families and Rebel Maidservants: The Biblical Hagar in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art and Literature* (New York, NY / London: Continuum, 2006), 2. Not all of the hundreds of surviving Dutch depictions of Hagar from this period treated her as a modest maternal figure, however. By the end of the seventeenth century, increased competition in the commercial art market, and the desire among artists to paint the nude, resulted in a rash of erotic depictions of Hagar. Sarah's presentation of Hagar to Abraham (Gen. 16:1–4) was a particularly popular theme within this sub-genre. Paintings by Mathais Stomer and Willem van Meiris are two other memorable examples, in which Abraham approaches the solemn task of propagating the patriarchal line with more enthusiasm than Sarah would prefer.

[50] Kirsten P. Buick, "The Ideal Works of Edmonia Lewis: Invoking and Inverting Autobiography," *American Art* 9.2 (1995): 5–19.

[51] Ibid., 5.

[52] Hagar's origins in Egypt, a nation widely coded as black Africa in nineteenth-century discourse, encouraged this identification; see Buick, "The Ideal Works," 10. While Hagar's nationality has faded in importance, contemporary writers have continued to appropriate Hagar as an African-American symbol. For instance, Maya Angelou alludes to Hagar in her poem "The Mothering Blackness," and Toni Morrison names a character Hagar in her novel *Song of Solomon*.

[53] Lewis cultivated a similarly strong sense of independence in her own life, choosing to live what was at the time a triply untraditional lifestyle as an unmarried expatriate artist. She sculpted *Hagar* in Rome, where she lived most of her life from 1865 onwards.

[54] I am not claiming that Hagar's white appearance is itself neutral, but rather that Lewis—within the discursive conventions of the nineteenth century—perceived such an appearance as neutral; or at least as neutral as possible.

[55] Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 10.

[56] Marco Livingstone, *George Segal, a Retrospective: Sculptures, Paintings, Drawing* (Montreal: The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1997), 29.

[57] In 1967, Segal described the process as follows: "When I'm finished casting, I'm left with a collapsed pile of pieces that are weak, floppy, cracked, broken. They have to be reconstructed and put together with more plaster. And the amount of time it takes me to build a figure is about ten times longer than the actual casting which is a gay, social time. The intensive work comes in the reconstruction . . . . I generally have to make modifications, and they're of all kinds or any kind, either plastic or psychological"; see Livingstone, *George Segal*, 57.

[58] Ibid., 24.

[59] Ibid., 136.

[60] Ibid., 137.

[61] Doug Adams argued that the human body is too often neglected as a vehicle for experiencing both art and religion. While he spells out this argument in *Transcendence with the Human Body in Art*, Adams's most convincing proof was in the classroom, where he called upon students to act out the gestures of

Segal's works, while speaking about how this made them feel. Segal, a longtime friend of Adams, endorsed this approach; see Doug Adams, *Transcendence with the Human Body in Art: Segal, De Staebler, Johns, and Christo* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1991), 33.

[62] While Hagar's veil is a common form of *hijab* for Muslim women, it is worth noting that the skullcap and phylacteries worn by Sarah are traditionally reserved for Orthodox Jewish men. The decision to dress Sarah in this way may reflect the artist's own religious sensibilities, or it may signal the authority of Sarah who indeed often asserts herself over Abraham in the biblical narrative. We might also think of Grossman's prayer for putting on *tefillin*, in which she asks for Sarah's blessing (see footnote 33).

[63] Personal communication with the artist on July 12, 2012.

[64] Marvin Wilson, *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1989).

[65] Delaney, *Abraham on Trial*, 135.

CHAPTER 36

NORWEGIAN MUSLIM AND CHRISTIAN FEMINISTS READING THE HAGAR NARRATIVES

ANNE HEGE GRUNG

THIS essay presents the results of a research project that explored the hermeneutical strategies of Norwegian Muslim and Christian feminist readers as they read the Hagar narrative together. The study demonstrated that the women employed distinct interpretative strategies, such as analogical reasoning or performative relations, to develop what the women considered to be meaningful interpretations. Their readings addressed important issues, such as religious identity politics, fears in the majority Christian and post-Christian population about Muslims and Islam, feelings of alienation among the Norwegian Muslim minorities, or worries about gender justice in the neoliberal global world. The women readers proposed various ways of dealing with challenges of interreligious interpretation. Some readers limited the conversation to the canonical texts of their respective religious tradition. Other readers explored the intertextuality of the Christian and Muslim texts. All of them realized that their particular religious understanding of the Hagar story was incomplete if they did not understand the interpretative tradition of the other religious community. They recognized the significance of being in dialog with readers whose religious tradition is different from their own. Thus they wished to actively correlate the other religious tradition to their own. In the process, the Norwegian Muslim and Christian feminist readers learned to trust each other and to yearn for neighborly

relations with each other despite the polarizing trends in today's Norway.

As the Norwegian Muslim and Christian feminist readers studied the Bible and the Qur'an together, they learned that the story of Hagar appears in Gen. 16:1–16; 21:8–21, and in the renowned Muslim commentary by Al Bukhari, a text in the Hadith.[1] Interestingly, neither the historicity of Hagar nor her identity stood in the foreground of their interpretations. Rather, Norwegian Muslim and Christian feminist readers wanted to know how Hagar's story is meaningfully read today. Discussing and debating this question, the Norwegian Muslim and Christian feminist readers identified beneficial ways of integrating Hagar's story that are not always directly related to the text in the Bible or the Hadith. Their meaning-making efforts also led to the development of friendships, and the conversations deepened their understanding of the text, of each other, and of their respective religious traditions. In this sense, then, the Hagar story in Islam and Christianity builds community among readers even today.

This research project consisted of the qualitative research with a group of Muslim and Christian women living in Norway and coming from diverse backgrounds. The participants were active in their respective Muslim and Christian faith communities. Some of them were Sunni and Shi'a Muslims while others were Lutheran and Roman Catholic Christians. In two three-hour sessions the participants were asked to read the stories of Hagar in the Bible and the Hadith literature.[2] The group was set up for the specific purpose of this research project, and the participants were self-declared feminists although this identity marker was not required for the participation. The meetings began with a shared meal and then the participants read as a group the prescribed texts. During the first meeting the women read the texts aloud, and during the second meeting the attendees read the texts silently. After the reading, the participants discussed the texts without any facilitation. In other words, the conversations proceeded without any particular plan, instruction, or guidance, and the participants were free to approach the texts and each other as they wished. During the first meeting eight women participated, of whom three were Muslim and five were Christian. During the second meeting only five participants participated, of whom two were Muslim and three were Christian. Previously the group had decided that any meeting should consist of a minimum of two Muslim and two Christian participants for the meeting to take place so that the number of attendees would be balanced. The study of their conversations was completed in June 2010.

The results of the study organize the four sections of this essay. They consist of the four main hermeneutical strategies that the women developed in their dialogical conversations on the Hagar narrative. The first section discusses the

hermeneutical strategy of analogical reasoning, which is the foundation for the other hermeneutical strategies. It demonstrates that the Norwegian feminist readers identified with Hagar in the biblical and Muslim texts. Importantly, analogical reasoning is foundational for the other three hermeneutical strategies, and so it receives more space than the others. The second section outlines the hermeneutical strategy of performative relations that the Muslim feminist readers used to empathize with Hagar and her fate in the story. The third section discusses the hermeneutical strategy of "moral enrichment" and "ethical critique" with which the Norwegian Muslim and Christian feminists evaluated the morals and ethics of the Hagar story. The fourth section considers the hermeneutical strategy of "testimony" with which the interpreters generated their "confessions." The conclusion, summarizing the main results, suggests perspectives for future research.

"Analogical Reasoning": A Hermeneutical Strategy of Identifying with the Story's Reality

The first prominent strategy that Norwegian Muslim and Christian feminist readers used in their readings of the Hagar story is the hermeneutical strategy of analogical reasoning. This strategy allowed readers to develop their interpretations on the basis of their personal perceptions of reality and their sense of experience. In other words, readers relied on this strategy to identify themselves with a character or an issue of the text and to develop their readings in conversation with their personal perceptions of reality and their sense of experience. This strategy did not preclude the interpreters from reading the texts from what they assumed to be the perspectives of the original narrator or the original audience since the women held traditional historical assumptions about the text.[3] Sometimes analogical reasoning also enabled the participants to create new stories and textual meanings that were either harmonious or disharmonious with conventional interpretations. Importantly, the strategy of analogical reasoning required readers to establish themselves as the subjects who determined the meanings of the texts. In fact, the hermeneutical strategy of analogical reasoning indicated that the Norwegian *Muslim* feminist readers had a far different and more extensive pre-understanding of Hagar than their Christian conversation partners. To the former, Hagar was a significant figure in Islam, a

role model for certain aspects of religious practice, such as Hagar's trust in God under difficult circumstances and her significance for the *sa'y*, a Muslim ritual during the *hajj*.[4] To the latter, Hagar and Ishmael were less important because the Christian participants believed Hagar to stand in the shadows of Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac. Still both groups relied on analogical reasoning when they discussed the Hagar story in their respective religious traditions.

Analogical reasoning also ensured that the women readers evaluated the stories from within their respective religious traditions. All of them expressed shock about the cruel behavior of Abraham and Sarah toward Hagar and Ishmael in the Genesis story. The Christian woman, Inger, a Lutheran Christian of Norwegian background,[5] called the expelling of Hagar and her son to the desert "the utmost brutality you can imagine."[6] She imagined herself abandoned by one's family, forced out into the desert with a small child. Her analogical reasoning relied on empathy and anger to interpret the story. Only one of the Christian participants, Rima, mentioned that she knew of this narrative before the meeting. She explained that her Catholic Middle Eastern tradition was particularly interested in this story although she thought it was about a miraculous rescue of a mother and her son in the desert. In her religious upbringing the narrative's meaning did not receive any particular religious connotation.[7] Aira, a Muslim participant with a Sunni Muslim Pakistani-Norwegian background, commented on Hagar and Ishmael when she criticized the Bible for including this story. After all, it reported a conflict that places Sarah and Abraham against Hagar. Aira pointed to the status of the Genesis story when she asserted: "To me divine revelation is not like that … it might be that people's own opinions have entered this because they have traditions like that."[8] She rejected parts of the biblical story as a revelatory text because people might have invented it. In other words, her personal insights about life shaped her reading.

As the Norwegian women employed the hermeneutical strategy of analogical reasoning, two topics became particularly important to them. They related to Hagar as being nameless in the Hadith and to Hagar as a mother. The first topic about Hagar's namelessness in the Hadith tradition bothered the participants across the religious spectrum. They spent considerable time addressing this issue in Islam. One of the Christian women, Eva, took the lead when she noticed that the text from the Hadith does not mention Hagar by name in contrast to the biblical text. She believed that the lack of her name indicates Hagar's lack of being "in charge" in the Hadith, in contrast to the biblical text which gives her a prominent role.[9] Eva also proposed that characterizing and naming Hagar only as "the mother of Ishmael" in the Hadith illustrates the oppressive views about

women in Islam because it denies Hagar a position as an individual subject. Identifying a woman with her son is a common practice in the Muslim tradition. Eva considered this practice oppressive because it highlights the fact that Islam does not value women as individuals. Predictably, some of the other participants disagreed with Eva's interpretation and tried to ameliorate her negative assessment of Islam. The women argued that identifying and naming women in relation to their children is also customary in other societies and not only in Muslim majority societies. For instance, two women of Christian and African-Norwegian background, Rima and Maria, acknowledged that this "naming" custom exists in their African countries of origin. Thus, both women found the practice to be delightful and not oppressive.[10]

Both women, however, also acknowledged that Eva's concern about Hagar's invisibility in the Hadith text is valid when compared to the women's countries of origin. For instance, Maria explained that men of her native country can divorce their wives if the marriage remains childless so that the husband is free to marry another wife to secure offspring for himself. For Maria, this African custom is similar to the Sarah and Hagar situation in Genesis. She observed that the biblical tale could even be based on the practices in parts of contemporary Africa. Grounded in analogical reasoning, she disclosed: "For me, when I read both these texts, I think very little has changed between those times and ours … . When I read this story, it could have been written from some of my places in Africa."[11] Yet importantly, analogical reasoning did not make the women agree with the text only because, in their views, it describes a contemporary custom or situation. For instance, Maria recognized that infertility is still mostly considered to be a woman's problem across cultures and traditions and therefore has different consequences for the affected woman, depending on the particularities of her location. Analogical reasoning thus enabled the Norwegian women to make connections between the text and themselves as they discussed the issue of naming, the absence of naming, or childbearing. At times, the women also observed similarities between the textual descriptions and today.

The second topic which the women discussed as part of exploring the hermeneutical strategy of analogical reasoning concerned Hagar as a mother. The women reviewed issues of motherhood in light of their personal experiences. When they considered Hagar and Ishmael in the desert, they debated whether Hagar performed her duties as a mother adequately. Several Christian readers accused Hagar of being a bad mother because she leaves her son alone to search for water. The Muslim women, however, did not agree with this assessment of Hagar. They insisted that Hagar is a good mother because she

does everything she can to find life-saving water for her son, even if the task meant leaving him alone for a while. As their debate turned to Hagar's dilemma, both the Muslim women engaged the text directly. In fact, they ignored any chronological, spatial, or contextual gaps between themselves and the text. Reading without distance, they interpreted the text with what Mieke Bal calls the "bold use of anachronisms."[12] At that moment readers took seriously the past and the present and found both in the text. As the women read the Hagar story, immersed themselves in the past of the storyline. They relied on their own insights and experiences with motherhood as they evaluated Hagar as a mother.

Yet again the hermeneutical strategy of analogical reasoning did not constrain the women to agree merely with the text and Hagar. For instance, Eva employed analogical reasoning in a most direct manner when she exclaimed: "So if I had a small child who was crying, would I leave him under a bush and walk away?"[13] In her rhetorical question she identified herself with Hagar's situation. Yet she also believed she would have acted differently than Hagar. Eva even accused Hagar of abandoning her child to escape the sadness she must have felt over Ishmael's impending death. Eva took her identification with Hagar to an emotional level. She suggested that Hagar's choice of leaving her son was based on Hagar's inability to relate to her feelings, as a good mother typically does. Implicitly, then, Eva suggested that she would never act like Hagar. She was a "good mother" in contrast to Hagar. Positioning herself as a subject in relation to the text, she criticized the biblical women. Even though Eva identified emotionally with Hagar's dilemma—"should Hagar have left her son or stayed with him"—she ended up opposing Hagar. Accordingly, Eva exclaimed that she would have solved Hagar's terrible dilemma in a better way.

Several Norwegian Muslim women readers, who also relied on analogical reasoning, came to a different assessment of Hagar's motherhood skills. For instance, Rima insisted that Hagar is a good mother when she leaves her son to find water for both of them. Another Muslim woman, Aira, agreed when she explained: "She went … to find water, and she looked in that direction [where Ishmael stayed] many times."[14] The Muslim women focused on Hagar's goal, namely, her search for water. In contrast to several of the Christian women, they did not consider Hagar's emotions as a possible reason for her leaving Ishmael behind.

By engaging analogical reasoning, then, different women were able to evaluate the significance of the story differently. Some integrated well-known interpretations because they knew the text and its interpretations well. Yet they never gave up their subject position when they employed the strategy of

analogical reasoning. For instance, Aira mentioned several details that exist in the interpretation history and are not part of the actual story. Aira thus stressed that Hagar looks after Ishmael from a distance, but she also emphasizes that Hagar's care makes her a good mother.

When the participants discussed the meaning of the tale according to the Muslim and Christian traditions, they relied on analogical reasoning to create what they believed to be a "reasonable" reading. Accordingly, texts and characters become like them. Although the women categorized the texts as historically distant stories of a different time and place, the women ignored the historical distance. As they identified with Hagar's nameless status, they considered her qualities as a mother from their personal experiences and perspectives. Thus, the women claimed agency over the text and criticized the text as well as Hagar on the basis of their lives.[15] In their readings, the texts merged with their experiences, except once when Aira criticized the biblical text. Analogical reasoning thus is a dominant hermeneutical strategy when the Norwegian Muslim and Christian feminists read Hagar's story.

"Performative Relation": A Hermeneutical Strategy of Embodying the Story

Another hermeneutical strategy stood out in Norwegian Muslim and Christian feminist interpretations of the Hagar story. Establishing meaning for its readers and related to analogical reasoning, the strategy of performative relation includes a performative element in the textual interpretation. This strategy was the preferred approach for the Muslim women, as they interpreted the Hagar narrative through the Islamic ritual of *sa'y*. They mentioned this ritual because it is an essential part of the *hajj*, the holiest pilgrimage for Muslims. During this ritual, pilgrims remember and imitate Hagar's search for water as they run up and down the Meccan heights of Safa and Marwa seven times. To the Norwegian Muslim women, the text and the ritual merged into one storyline when they interpreted the scene of Hagar and Ishmael in the desert. Although the dramatic content of this potentially life-threatening situation for mother and child contributed to the merger, the performative relation between the Muslim readers and the text was unique to the Muslim readers because the Christian women did not even know about this central Muslim ritual. For instance, Aira told the group about her experience when she and many other female and male pilgrims from

around the globe ran between Safa and Marwa to imitate Hagar's footsteps. She exclaimed:

> I have been there, and I ran seven times from Marwa to Safa. Then it was just as if I had the same worries that Hagar had, and when you look at it, you feel God's presence, and feel that … God said, I am here for you, I have heard the boy's cry, so she stayed and we feel that in remembrance of that day we run seven times; it is called *sa'y*. Then we feel that God will listen to us too.[16]

Aira identified closely with Hagar because of Aira's experience as a pilgrim of the *hajj*. Her identification with the biblical character put the dispute about Hagar as a mother into a new light. Aira claimed that what is said about Hagar is also said about Aira and any other Muslim who identifies with Hagar on the *hajj*. Referring to the reading process in the co-reading practice of Scriptural Reasoning from a Muslim perspective, Tim Winter mentions the concept of Muslims as para-witnesses to Muslim texts. A para-witness is drawn closely to the text and does not function as an objective interpreter. This idea is useful for understanding the performative relationship between the textual Hagar and the reference to the *sa'y*.[17] The women readers identified with Hagar because of this ritual.

The creative use of establishing a performative relation to Hagar through the performance of a Muslim ritual illustrates the Norwegian Muslim feminist need to counteract marginalization and perhaps even victimization in a dominantly Western, Christian-centric culture and society. Muslims, and particularly Muslim women in Western societies, experience considerable levels of discrimination, as stereotypes about Islam permeate Norwegian culture. The historian Margaretha van Es observes that Muslims in Norway and elsewhere in Europe have begun to counteract these stereotypes.[18] She describes their efforts to escape the notion of Muslim women as oppressed, subjugated, and victimized by Muslim patriarchy. These stereotypes ignore their individuality and stigmatize Muslim women as if no differences existed among them. The prejudices also impact Muslim men when the entire religion is rejected as being oppressive and discriminatory against women.[19] To counteract this kind of stereotyping, the Norwegian Muslim women readers established closeness between themselves and Hagar to remind their Christian conversation partners about the Muslim connection to this text and Hagar. The Muslim women stressed that Hagar is like Muslim women, and Muslim women are like Hagar. Accordingly, Hibba Abugidieri and Riffat Hassan affirmed that Hagar is their model leader, even a model for gender *jihad*, and an icon of Muslim faith and confidence.[20] Hassan also reminded the other women that Hagar is a *hanifa*, a God-friend, just as Ibrahim is called a *hanif*.[21]

The hermeneutical strategy of performative relation thus encouraged the Muslim women to claim their and Hagar's agency. They stressed Hagar's and their importance to one of the founding fathers of both the Muslim and the Christian traditions, namely Abraham. With the assistance of establishing performative relations with Hagar during the most important Muslim pilgrimage, the Norwegian Muslim women reclaimed their agency and authority over against Christian criticism and rejection.

"Moral Enrichment" and "Ethical Critique": A Hermeneutical Strategy of Evaluating the Story

Yet another hermeneutical strategy stands out in the Norwegian Muslim and Christian feminist discussion of Hagar's story. This strategy helped the participants to evaluate the textual meaning according to moral and ethical standards that they brought to the text. In the process the women placed their readerly agency above the text, as they evaluated its moral and ethical viability for their lives. Importantly, this hermeneutical strategy finds validation in religious, biblical, and interfaith scholarship. For instance, the religious studies scholar Abou el Fadl explores the concept of moral enrichment in textual interpretation when he elaborates on the interpretation of the Qur'an and other Muslim texts.[22] Also the renowned biblical exegete Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza recommends that textual interpretation include the examination of the ethics of the texts under consideration.[23] The theologian and scholar in interreligious studies Oddbjørn Leirvik advises bringing the issue of ethics to situations in which Muslims and Christians read texts together.[24] Yet Leirvik also remarks that a slight distinction between morality and ethics must be upheld, especially when the distinction pertains to the different status of the Qur'an in Islam and the Bible in Christianity. He observes that the ethical critique might, in fact, result in the abandonment of particular biblical texts. In contrast, the hermeneutics of moral enrichment seeks to establish harmonious responses to difficult texts in the Muslim tradition. In both cases readers accept responsibility for textual meaning.

Importantly, the Norwegian Muslim and Christian feminist readers used the hermeneutical strategy of moral enrichment and ethical critique as part of their meaning-making process. As the Christian readers reacted with moral outrage

about Hagar's treatment by Sarah and Abraham in Genesis, and as they discussed Hagar's dilemma about leaving Ishmael alone, they criticized sharply the ethics of the text. They also questioned the ethics of the entire story because, to them, the whole narrative illustrated the discrimination of Hagar as a woman and slave. Yet the Christian readers were not of one mind. For instance, Maria asserted that the Genesis text not only illustrates Hagar's discrimination in ancient Israel, as Eva and Inger claimed, but also describes similar acts of discrimination and exclusion today. In Maria's view, therefore, the present conditions encourage anybody to oppose the story on moral grounds.[25] Yet the Christian readers also criticized Sarah and Abraham, as well as the Christian tradition, for overlooking Hagar.

The Muslim women, however, evaluated the tale's ethics differently. Their reflections established a textual hierarchy between the biblical text and the Hadith. To Muslim women, human weaknesses, such as jealousy, rivalry, discrimination, and exclusion as portrayed in Genesis, could not possibly be part of the divine revelation because the text contains very bad illustrations that cannot be considered as the will of God.[26] To the Muslim women, the biblical teaching is an irresponsible message that must be abandoned, and only the Hadith passage is an exemplary ethical text. In short, the division among the Muslim and Christian readers was at its starkest when they evaluated the morality and ethics of the tale, as both groups remained closely divided according to their religious identity markers.

"Testimony": A Hermeneutical Strategy of Generating Confessions

A fourth hermeneutical strategy, specifically the strategy of testimony, emerged in the discussions among the Norwegian Muslim and Christian women. Using this strategy, the women confessed their religious identity to assert their authority over the meaning of the Hagar story. Interestingly, both the Norwegian Muslim and the Christian feminist readers alternated between using the narrative from their own religious tradition as the basis for interpreting the Hagar story of the other religious tradition and letting the narratives merge in the conversations. Sometimes they transposed the differences between both texts from the past to the present, and at other times they regarded both text as a challenge in their shared meaning-making efforts. The women also debated whether Hagar is

oppressed and marginalized. The discussion demonstrated that this theme carried different meanings for the differently located women. The Muslim women identified with Hagar, as shown earlier, and their identification with Hagar constituted their approach to the text. The Christian women, however, did not identify to the same degree with Hagar. They classified both narratives as tales about patriarchal oppression and used the stories as a negative mirror for articulating their feminist views. For instance, Eva criticized the narrative in the Hadith for not mentioning Hagar's name, but Aria criticized Eva and the other Christian readers for narrowing the story's perspective and for concentrating on a feminist interpretation of Hagar.

When the women made their confessions, they correlated their religious beliefs and feminist interpretations. From the start all of the participants self-identified as feminists. They considered their religious belief as crucial for finding and pursuing a feminist stance. Yet there was also an important difference. The feminist identity of the Muslim women came under pressure during the conversation with their Christian co-readers when they disagreed with the feminist critique of the texts. Still, the Christian feminists also felt compelled to defend their religious commitment, explaining that they did not cling to ideology.

The following exchange illustrates what happened between the two groups. Eva exclaimed: "I don't agree that I am less of a believer because I am a feminist. Just to make that clear." Aira replied: "I won't say that … . A Christian could see it the same way I do. I also call myself a feminist … . I have my own frameworks so that I can be a completely independent woman, and I do not tolerate any discrimination."[27] At this point the co-reading of the Hagar story turned into a defensive challenge of self-representation that depended on the Muslim and Christian readers and their efforts to interpret the texts and their identification with Hagar. Importantly, the women did not limit their disagreements to the textual level. Rather, the differences played out between the readers, their respective understandings of the texts, and the challenges of the texts for today's readers. The exchange illustrates the testimonial character of the conversation about the Hagar story. Such an exchange helped, encouraged, and generated in the participants of either religious background the desire to articulate religious belief *and* feminist conviction.

Sometimes the confessions articulated an inclusive perspective on religious pluralism. For instance, Shirin, a Shi'a Muslim of an Iranian-Norwegian background, asserted:

> After Sarah had a son as well, things became kind of scattered, since faith takes another direction.

> What is very important to me is that perhaps it was so that it should go other places than where Abraham originally stayed … . The most important message is that it was supposed to be two nations.[28]

The confessions of faith and feminism was related to interpretations of religious pluralism, including ideas about God. In the occasionally heated discussions among the Christian participants over who was to blame for Hagar's desperate situation in the desert, the women did not accuse God of being irresponsible. Maria observed:

> The crucial point I find in them [the Hagar texts] is faith, we need to have faith. And that God keeps promises with no difference between the Koran and the Bible. In the end he does what he promises to do, to protect humans and that humans will become numerous in the world.[29]

Maria connected her emphasis on faith to the here and now. She testified to what she claimed to be the truth about God, based on her understanding of both texts without any differentiation between them. Thus, hHer comment must be understood as a testimonial to the interreligious meaning of Hagar's story.

Importantly, the testimonials were consistently part of the women's conversations. This strategy was particularly obvious in Aira's reference to her performance of the *sa'y*. Her comment touched upon faith and feminism, divine legitimation of religious and cultural pluralism, and God's faithfulness and protection. Aira identified human equality and what we could call "gender justice" as present and located in different places. In Aira's experience, human equality and gender justice occurred in the *sa'y*. Another position emerged from the contributions of Maria, a Christian Norwegian, who claimed that human equality appears only in divine perspective. Another Christian woman, Eva, argued that contemporary Norway is a place fostering these qualities. She stressed that inhumanity is outside of contemporary Christian Norway, stating:

> Slavery is inhuman, and the view of women … . It is not equality, but it is a different time, and I would say that luckily we have gradually seen more of God's revelation, and I do believe that Norway has never been as Christian a country as it is today.[30]

Predictably, Eva's comment about contemporary Norway as representing the Christian tradition raised several concerns. They related to marginalized and excluded people in today's Norway, to the kind of Christianity Eva had in mind, and to the consequences of her stance from the perspectives of those who are marginalized and excluded. Did Eva believe that Christian readers approach Muslim co-readers as oppressed and marginalized minorities who are like Hagar, because Christian regard this biblical character as an oppressed and marginalized

outsider?

The hermeneutical strategy of the confession and the testimonial witnessing brought to the fore some uncomfortable insights about supersessionist assumptions among the Christian Norwegian women. Their testimonials contrasted to the earlier statements of Shirin and Maria, which pointed toward divine legitimization of pluralism and inclusion. The Genesis narrative provided an opportunity to perform self-criticism of the Christian tradition when read among Christians, and the Christian readers engaged with the patriarchal structures in their tradition, but only from historical perspectives. Muslim readers identified Hagar as a "marginalized woman" or "the Other." Yet contemporary "othering" of Muslim women remained addressed. Similarly, the testimonies about divinely legitimated pluralism (Shirin and Maria) and the description of Hagar's role as a civilization builder and a *hanifa* by the Muslim readers were stated but not discussed. As a whole, the group engaged insufficiently with the testimonial gaps although they favored a shared understanding of their respective texts and the world in which they live.

Dialogical Readings as Producers of Hermeneutical Strategies: A Conclusion

The co-readings of the Hagar narratives by Norwegian Muslim and Christian feminists in the group produced four distinctive hermeneutical strategies: (1) analogical reasoning with which interpreters asserted authority and responsibility over the texts; (2) performative relation with which women read the texts by identifying with Hagar; (3) moral enrichment and ethical critique with which the women evaluated the texts ethically; and (4) the strategy of testimony with which readers articulated their confessions about textual meanings.

The research project displays the possibilities and challenges emerging from a cross-religious co-reading of the Hagar story. The most significant outcome is that textual meanings expand when Muslims and Christians read them together. The expanded meanings include discussions about power relations, self-understanding, and habits of othering based on social status, ethnicity, and religious affiliation. The study also illustrates the difficulties of agreeing on the characteristics of a feminist reading. These issues would remain invisible if Muslim and Christian readers had not read the texts together. The research project also combines biblical feminist scholarship, work on Muslim-Christian

relations, and qualitative research. Perhaps future researchers will want to move beyond Muslim and Christian traditions and develop opportunities for hermeneutical projects of co-reading. The study of sacred texts with "ordinary" readers of various religious traditions promises much needed understanding and community building among differently situated people in society, especially between native and migrant populations.

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[1] Muhammad ibn Isma'il Bukhari, *Sahih Al-Bukhari: The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih Al-Bukhari, Arabic-English* (trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan; 4.55.583; Medina: Dar al-Fikr, 1981). The translation is available online at http://i-cias.com/textarchive/bukhari/055.htm.

[2] For a full presentation of the participants in the group and the methodology used, see Anne Hege Grung, *Gender Justice in Muslim-Christian Readings: Christian and Muslim Women in Norway Making Meaning of Texts from the Bible, the Koran and the Hadith* (Leiden / Boston, MA: Brill Rodopi, 2015), 99–142.

[3] Ibid., 52.

[4] Ibid., 180.

[5] All the names of the participants in the reading group are fictive names.

[6] Ibid., 180.

[7] Ibid., 180.

[8] Ibid., 219–20.

[9] Ibid., 181.

[10] Ibid., 192.

[11] Grung, *Gender Justice*, 186.

[12] Bal, Mieke. *Loving Yusuf: Conceptual Travels from Present to Past* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 48.

[13] Grung, *Gender Justice*, 196.

[14] Ibid., 203.

[15] Fabian defines "coevalness" as the Western scholarly effort to establish a sense of shared, intersubjective time as the basis for communication and knowledge production; see Johannes Fabian, *Time and Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1983), 42.

[16] Ibid., 225.

[17] See Tim Winter's reflection over the practice of Scriptural Reasoning in his book, *The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006).

[18] Margaretha A. van Es, *Stereotypes and Self-Representations of Women with a Muslim Background: The Stigma of Being Oppressed* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

[19] Ibid., 76.

[20] Hibba Abugidieri, "Hagar: A Historical Model for Gender Jihad," in *Daughters of Abraham: Feminist Thought in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2001), 87–107; Riffat Hassan, "Islamic Hagar and Her Family," in *Hagar, Sarah, and their Children: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Perspectives*, ed. Phyllis Trible and Letty M. Russell (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 149–67.

[21] Ibid., 154.

[22] Abou El Fadl, Joshua Cohen Khaled, and Ian Lague, *The Place of Tolerance in Islam* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002).

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[24] Oddbjørn Leirvik, "The Ethical Critique of the Scriptures," in *Interreligious Hermeneutics in Pluralistic Europe: Between Texts and People*, ed. David Cheetham, Ulrich Winkler, Oddbjørn Leirvik, and Judith Gruber. (Amsterdam / New York, NY: Rodopi, 2011), 333–52.

[25] Grung, *Gender Justice*, 238.

[26] Ibid., 220.

[27] Ibid., 231–32.

[28] Ibid., 216.

[29] Ibid., 238.

[30] Ibid., 229.

CHAPTER 37

INTERTEXTUAL FEMININITY IN PROVERBS AND THE DAO DE JING

DAVID A. SCHONES

POSTSTRUCTURAL feminist scholars seek to demythologize a static universal concept of femininity. In the field of religious studies, these scholars deconstruct gender categories in religious texts and traditions to expose biological determinism as a tool of patriarchal ideology and female marginalization. As Esther Fuchs suggests, this transformational approach questions "the very notion and definition of 'women,' to trace the discursive emergence of this category in the text, and to delineate the hierarchical power relations in the most basic representations of this subject, on the level of language."[1] Although poststructural scholarship, as Fuchs notes, challenges the definition of "femininity," surprisingly few feminist scholars contrast the depiction of gender across religious traditions. Put another way, the tools and methods used by feminist scholars working with Daoist, Buddhist, and Hindu texts rarely inform feminist biblical scholarship and vice versa. This gap in scholarship occurs despite the fact that diverse representations of femininity and masculinity in religious texts seem to be an obvious point of entry for deconstructing stable gender categories. Many feminist biblical scholars, like their colleagues working with other religious traditions, generally self-impose boundaries between their sub-fields. This lack of dialog, in turn, hinders collaboration between poststructural feminist scholars and limits the impact of their deconstructive efforts. Working under these self-imposed limitations, poststructural feminist scholars fail to utilize the diverse gender representations in various religious

texts and traditions to deconstruct an essentialized presentation of femininity and masculinity.

This essay presents an intertextual poststructural analysis that contrasts the concept of femininity as it appears in Proverbs and the *Dao De Jing*. Instead of viewing the definition of femininity within each text as stable, the examination emphasizes that "texts are always spilling over into other texts."[2] These "spills" create points of contact for deconstructing stable gender categories. With this intertextual framework in mind, my analysis of Proverbs and the *Dao De Jing* proceeds in two parts. The first section exposes the symbol of the mother in the *Dao De Jing* as an essentialized representation of fecundity or female reproduction. I compare this figure with the symbol of the Strong Woman of Proverbs 31 who, like the Daoist concept of *wuwei*, reverses patriarchal gender expectations. The second section examines the symbols of Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman of Proverbs 1–9. These two figures are then deconstructed through the Daoist symbols of *yin* and *yang*, indicating that both Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman promote patriarchal ideology. The conclusion notes the similarities and differences on the use of feminine imagery between the *Dao De Jing* and Proverbs. An intertextual conversation between these two sources is thus necessary and beneficial for feminist and gender-oriented scholars alike.

A Strong Mother? The Mother in the *Dao De Jing* and the Strong Woman of Proverbs 31

In comparison to the various texts and genres in the Hebrew Bible, the *Dao De Jing* is quite small. Many contemporary Daoist scholars date the text, itself only around 5,000 words, "between roughly 400 B.C.E. and 200 B.C.E. …[with] the earliest manuscripts discovered [dating] to approximately 200 B.C.E."[3] The narrative is traditionally attributed to the sage Laozi who, in the legendary accounts, was said to have been a teacher and contemporary of Confucius. In reality, Laozi means "old master" and certainly does not refer to an individual author. Rather, the *Dao De Jing* is an anonymous text compiled by several very different authors and editors. Understood in this way, the *Dao De Jing* functions as a collection of mystical sayings or teachings grouped together on the basis of similar symbols. These symbols, in turn, describe a Dao or "way" advocated in

the text. In other words, the symbols used to represent the Dao in the *Dao De Jing* idealize specific characteristics which are meant to promote living in harmony within society and the world.

One of the most prominent feminine symbols of the Dao in the *Dao De Jing* is the "mother." Direct comparisons between the Dao and mother appear a total of seven times,[4] most prominently in chapter 25:

> Something mysteriously formed,
> Born before heaven and Earth.
> In the silence and the void,
> Standing alone and unchanging,
> Ever present and in motion.
> Perhaps it is the mother of [all] things.
> I do not know its name
> Call it Dao. (DDJ 25.1–7)[5]

In this chapter, the mother is presented as the mysterious origin and creative force in the universe. Or, as Yueh-Ting Lee summarizes: "Laozi believed that females are the mothers of all things and all human beings. In accordance with the Dao … females are those that produce all things. Without females or mothers, there is nothing else in the world."[6] The emphasis placed on motherhood and female reproduction in the *Dao De Jing* is unique. Daoist scholars of all persuasions often highlight the elevated role femininity plays in the articulation of Daoist philosophy.[7] Some, like Lee, go so far as to argue that the *Dao De Jing* espouses a sort of proto-feminism: "[P]erhaps philosophically or religiously, Laozi could be seen as one of the first proponents of feminism in human history."[8] In this sense, therefore, the Daoist concepts of femininity and motherhood are vitally important to a comprehensive understanding of Daoism and, more specifically, of the *Dao De Jing*.

The importance placed on motherhood and femininity in Daoist literature has, in turn, strongly influenced feminist scholarship on the topic. Early Daoist feminist scholars, employing the same mythologizing strategy used by biblical scholars such as Susan Ackerman, read the *Dao De Jing* with the goal of uncovering hidden Goddess symbols.[9] For instance, in "Tao as the Great Mother and the Influence of Motherly Love in the Shaping of Chinese Philosophy," Ellen Marie Chen proposes that the mother in the *Dao De Jing* represents a Goddess figure which she terms the "Great Mother."[10] Chen links this maternal symbol directly with female fertility:

> The [*Dao De Jing*] aims at conveying to us the presence and efficacy of a female creative power. Its origin was rooted in the worship of the Mother-goddess … . All the symbols of the Great Mother—dark, night, chasm, cave, abyss, valley, depths, womb—are present in the descriptions of the [Dao] … . [The mother is] the Archetypal Feminine, which contains and produces all things from within its emptiness.[11]

Chen claims that the Great Mother, characterized by multiple feminine symbols for the Dao, describes an archetypal female figure. This archetype represents a distinct female power or presence in the text whose "origin was rooted in the worship of the Mother-goddess."[12] More importantly, for Chen, the primary characteristic of this Goddess is her "creative" or more properly procreative ability. Chen pointedly highlights this figure's fecundity, her ability to "produce" life. This emphasis on the mother's reproductive capacity, in turn, leads Chen to identify this figure as a naturalistic creation Goddess, even on occasion referring to her as "Mother Nature."[13] Although Chen does not provide any examples that directly support this comparison between the Great Mother and Mother Nature, her use of this language is striking. For Chen, the symbol of the mother describes a creation Goddess figure in the *Dao De Jing* who, while forgotten by contemporary practitioners, represents a unique philosophical tradition that valorizes female reproductive power.

In her work Chen claims that, "apart from one or two short articles in which the feminine origin of the [Dao] is mentioned in passing, this very unique and important aspect of the [*Dao De Jing*] has not been seriously examined."[14] In this sense, therefore, Chen utilizes a feminist strategy that identifies female symbols as a topic of scholarly interest. Her work brings attention to the importance of maternal imagery in the Daoist philosophical tradition. Even so, her analysis of the Great Mother does not address how this symbol adheres to the patriarchal status quo. Simply put, Chen does not recognize the problem of identifying femininity exclusively with reproductive capacity. While useful in highlighting a potential goddess symbol, her interpretation reinscribes a traditional gender role to this figure. The mother goddess is valued almost exclusively for her ability to create and sustain life. Thus, by only highlighting the mother's fecundity, Chen supports the androcentric notion that women are valorized primarily through their ability to reproduce. Her interpretation essentializes the characterization of femininity in the *Dao De Jing* and reduces other feminine symbols of the Dao, such as the water and valley, to a "female creative power."[15]

Although scholars like Chen highlight the symbol of the mother as an example of woman's favored status in the *Dao De Jing*, recent work is divided

on the usefulness of feminine imagery in this text. Scholars, such as Judith Chuan Xu, suggest that by "using traditional feminine images such as the female, mother, valley, and water to symbolize the Dao … the [*Dao De Jing*] ushers a different voice into the traditional Chinese patriarchal world."[16] Yet, Karyn Lai argues: "[T]he Daoist affirmation of submissiveness as a feminine characteristic could be interpreted as merely reaffirming the traditional view that women are complementary and subsidiary to men."[17] Attempting to resolve this dilemma, Xu offers an intriguing solution. She deconstructs the "traditional concepts of sex and gender … to prevent a patriarchal appropriation of the feminine images and values in the [*Dao De Jing*] as the definition of femininity."[18] Using a poststructuralist framework, Xu claims that the *Dao De Jing* may reinforce patriarchal ideology, but it also can be used to undermine stable gender categories. She explains:

> By recommending feminine ways to the male sages as the way to govern the empire … the [*Dao De Jing*] both implicitly and explicitly breaks down traditional norms and conceptions of Man and Woman … [which] offers poststructural feminists a new horizon for transcending the patriarchal gender dichotomy.[19]

Xu's transcendent, perhaps even transgendered, interpretation certainly disrupts a stable masculine identity in the *Dao De Jing*. Yet her analysis of female images, particularly the "mysterious female," idealizes fecundity as a central female attribute. This assumption is exemplified in Xu's reading of chapter 6:

> The valley spirit is immortal;
> This is called the mysterious female.
> The gate of the mysterious female,
> This is called the root of heaven and earth. (6.1–3)

According to Xu's translation, the gate of the mysterious female represents "the uterus or the female genital organ."[20] Similarly, Katrin Froese suggests: "The sexual imagery reflected in the notion of the gateway is obvious and it is clear that a connection is made between the origins of the universe and the act of giving birth."[21] Notably, neither Xu nor Froese critique this reproductive image. On the contrary, Xu extols woman's reproductive capacity as one of the central characteristics of the Dao.[22] Xu also strongly emphasizes destabilizing a gender binary, but her interpretation of feminine symbols of the Dao is almost identical to Chen's reading. Admittedly, Xu recognizes that the symbol of the mother runs the risk of reifying maternity.[23] Yet she also explains that the *Dao De Jing* moves beyond a traditional gender dichotomy and "does not use feminine

images to vindicate the traditional notions of femininity."[24] Thus, Xu deconstructs one stable gender category—the construction of masculinity in the *Dao De Jing*, but reinforces the characterization of femininity as directly related to reproductive capacity. Put another way, in Xu's reading the Daoist concept of masculinity moves beyond traditional gender norms whereas femininity continues to be associated with fertility and reproduction.

The nearly exclusive emphasis on female fecundity in feminist Daoist scholarship suggests the need for an intertextual deconstructive framework. One point of comparison, taken from Proverbs, is the symbol of the Strong Woman in Proverbs 31. The figure of the Strong Woman, like that of the mother and mysterious female in the *Dao De Jing*, is a maternal figure that embodies a "way" endorsed in the text. Importantly, the Strong Woman is valorized for characteristics other than her reproductive capacity. Verses 13–24, for example, detail the various practices of the Strong Woman. Her presentation is a portrait in motion, moving from one project to another. In the poem the Strong Woman is an artisan (vv. 13, 19, 22, 24) and a woman of business (vv. 14, 16, 24). Her power and influence in this chapter derive from these abilities, as opposed to her ability to produce children.

Although the Strong Woman exemplifies the economic and artistic abilities of women in ancient Israel, some feminist biblical scholars propose that this list of attributes reinforces patriarchal ideology. For instance, Katherine Sakenfeld states:

> Here is a picture of a woman who can do everything, who never needs any sleep, who can be a merchant, farmer, seamstress, chef, organizer, fountain of wisdom, volunteer worker, who has perfect children who bless her rather than whine or fight, and who can see to her husband's advancement.[25]

In other words, the qualities of the Strong Woman support patriarchal society. She is valued because she advances her husband's house. As a "supermom,"[26] she does everything selflessly, toiling for the benefit of the patriarch, whether he is her father, husband, or kyriarchal community. Even so, for other feminist readers this figure is a source of liberation. Again, Sakenfeld explains: "This text offers a new horizon of freedom for women, an open door through which women can move out of and beyond traditional stereotypes of their role in Western society."[27] The complicated and competing interpretations of the Strong Woman are based on her economic activities. She counters patriarchal expectations of honor and shame by moving and working outside of the home. Yet, "because she does [her work] in service to [her husband], bearing the produce of her inward

works, her potential violation of cultural norms instead brings honor."[28]

The feminist critique of the Strong Woman as a male creation of a patriarchal ideal is certainly valuable. The Strong Woman advances an androcentric agenda, but she also complicates the universalized presentation of femininity as reproductive capacity. For instance, the Strong Woman has children (v. 28), but they are not mentioned until the very end of the poem. Even then, her offspring are only noted for their praise of the mother. While this verse establishes the Strong Woman as a mother figure, emphasis is not placed on her fecundity. Instead, she is praised for her creativity, ingenuity, and business prowess. In this way, the Strong Woman challenges the static reproductive symbol of the mother, as portrayed in the *Dao De Jing*.

Whereas the Strong Woman directly challenges the maternal presentation of femininity in the *Dao De Jing*, this figure also overlaps significantly with the Daoist concept of *wuwei*. Often described as "not doing,"[29] this concept refers to a type of spontaneous effortless action. While *wuwei* is often defined as "feminine," the symbol itself is exclusively applied to male characters, particularly rulers and leaders. One of the most famous examples of the application of this symbol to male figures is Cook Ding in chapter 3 of the *Zhuangzi*:

> What I care about is the Way [Dao], which goes beyond skill … . I go along with the natural makeup, strike in the big hollows, guide the knife through the big openings, and follow things as they are. So I never touch the smallest ligament or tendon, much less a major joint.[30]

In this passage, Cook Ding teaches Lord Wenhui how to properly butcher a cow. Of course, the lesson itself does not describe a proper technique, but Cook Ding himself serves as an instructive example of how to properly live by following *wuwei*. At the conclusion of the conversation, Wenhui declares: "I have heard the words of Cook Ding and learned how to care for life!"[31] The figure of Cook Ding highlights the disconnect between the feminine symbol of *wuwei* and the male characters who embody this term. Although *wuwei* is described through feminine imagery, "the fact that there are no female sages in either Laozi's [*Dao De Jing*] or Zhuangzi's texts suggests that there is a high premium placed on man's achievement … . Woman has no limitations to overcome and therefore she cannot teach mortals to appreciate the Dao."[32] Thus, male artisans and workers embody *wuwei* and male leaders use this symbol as an instructive metaphor. Accordingly, one of the only female symbols for the Dao not described through reproductive imagery does not truly represent women. On the contrary, the *Dao De Jing* describes *wuwei* as a type of submissive femininity, but in practice this

symbol represents men who, following the Dao, "overcome" their masculinity.

In contrast, the Strong Woman of Proverbs 31 exemplifies this term through the selfless orientation of her activities both inside and outside the home. She carries out her various projects removed from the goal of self-interest. In fact, the author of the poem reports three times that her work is conducted not for herself but for the sake of her household (Prov. 31:15, 21, 27). Feminist scholars rightly criticize the selfless orientation of the Strong Woman's work as indicative of fulfilling her role in patriarchal society. As Fontaine observes: "[T]he success of this woman is viewed from the perspective of what she provides for her husband and children. It is her fulfillment of the roles in the home assigned to her by society that causes her to be praised."[33] Nevertheless, read together with the *Dao De Jing*, the actions of the Strong Woman are instructive. Yoder maintains: "[T]he labor of woman is here elevated, theologically legitimated, and claimed as the preferable means of moral and theological instruction of the whole community."[34] The Strong Woman's activities serve as an impetus for female and male readers alike to reorient their lives according to this selfless figure. In this way, the symbol of the Strong Woman comes full circle. She contrasts the emphasis on female reproduction found in the *Dao De Jing*. At the same time, her actions reflect the submissive orientation of *wuwei* idealized in Daoist literature. Accordingly, the Strong Woman simultaneously undermines a universal symbol of femininity as fecundity while she also exemplifies the "female" embodiment of *wuwei*.

The Dao of Woman Wisdom? Proverbs 1–9 and *Yin-Yang* in the *Dao De Jing*

The way in Proverbs, like the Dao in the *Dao De Jing*, is often attributed to a female figure, in this case "Woman Wisdom." This similarity creates another point of entry for contrasting the concept of femininity described in each text. Proverbs presents Woman Wisdom as a creative force in the formation of the world. In chapter 8, for instance, Wisdom proclaims:

> YHWH received[35] me in the beginning of God's works; before the deeds of God, long ago … when YHWH prescribed the sea its limit, so that the water would not transgress God's command. When YHWH prescribed the foundations of the earth; then I was beside God, as a master artisan; and I was a daily delight rejoicing before YHWH always. (8:22, 29–30)

Feminist scholarship on this passage often focuses on the deification of Woman Wisdom. For example, Claudia Camp offers a mythologized reading of Proverbs 8:

> This near-deification of Woman Wisdom in 8:22–36 cannot help but recall certain ancient goddesses, in this case especially Ma'at, the Egyptian goddess of justice, who was also understood both as the child of the creator god and (especially in Egyptian wisdom literature) as the ordering principle of creation.[36]

Similarly, Judith E. McKinlay muses whether Woman Wisdom reflects ancient Israelite worship of Asherah:

> The wisdom imagery is not so much "set in opposition to goddess through the use of goddess language," but comes into use as the result of a convergence of Asherah, the divine consort of Yahweh, once or possibly even still known and worshipped in the cult with Yahweh. "She" will now no longer be an entity separate from Yahweh but, merged with Yahweh, become the Wisdom of Yahweh personified.[37]

Like Chen in her interpretation of the Great Mother, Camp and McKinlay highlight the possible use of Goddess imagery in this chapter. The feminist framework, employed by both scholars, does not critique the features of Woman Wisdom. It also gives little attention to whether this symbol supports or undermines patriarchal ideology. Rather, both scholars reclaim the importance of analyzing this female symbol. Camp and McKinlay recognize that Woman Wisdom's co-creator status with YHWH raises her teaching or "way" in line with the natural order of the world.

The deification of Woman Wisdom in Proverbs 8 provides an obvious point of comparison with the life-giving role of the mother in the *Dao De Jing*:

> The beginning of the universe
> Is the mother of all things.
> Knowing the mother, you also know the sons.
> Knowing the sons, yet remaining in touch with the mother,
> Brings freedom from the fear of death. (DDJ 52.1–4)

In both passages, female figures are present at the formation of the world, as they serve a pivotal role in the creative and sustaining process of life. However, there is a significant discrepancy in the function of these symbols. The *Dao De Jing* encourages readers to emulate feminine symbols of the Dao:

> Loving the people and ruling the country,
> Can you be without cleverness [*wuwei*]?
> Opening and closing the gate of heaven,

Here, readers are taught to "play the role of a woman" by following the selfless orientation of *wuwei*. Alternatively, Proverbs objectifies the symbol of Woman Wisdom. Presented as a treasure of unsurpassable value (Prov. 3:15), readers are instructed to embrace (4:8) or call Wisdom a "sister" (7:4). The passages promote intimacy rather than identification with Woman Wisdom. Consequently, both texts endorse the "way" through feminine symbols, but Proverbs does not destabilize a masculine gender category. Instead it tells readers to obtain rather than emulate Woman Wisdom.[38]

Of course, Woman Wisdom is only one feminine figure in Proverbs. Another feminine figure that is often contrasted with her is the "Strange Woman." Feminist scholars offer competing interpretations of this symbol of femininity. For instance, Camp claims that, like Woman Wisdom, the Strange Woman can be attributed to post-exilic goddess worship. In this case, however, the Strange Woman represents "the danger of foreign cultic activity" or possibly intermarriage with women outside the Israelite community.[39] Camp's mythologizing interpretation indicates that the figure of the Strange Woman typifies "forces deemed destructive of patriarchal control of family, property, and society."[40] Alternatively, Mieke Heijerman argues that feminist scholars must serve "as advocates of sorts for the 'strange' woman."[41] Like Camp, she proposes that the Strange Woman represent a "rival" or a "scapegoat" to patriarchal ideology. Heijerman states: "Her behaviour damages early post-exilic Israelite society, which requires solid families in order to preserve land and capital and, of course, obtain offspring."[42] Yet Heijerman also suggests that the Strange Woman may simply characterize the "needy" or marginalized in Israelite society. Forced into "occasional prostitution" due to financial straits, the Strange Woman "is not a woman who does not adapt herself to society. On the contrary, she is perforce flexible, and lives in the religious hope that her life will undergo a favourable shift."[43] In this sense, therefore, the Strange Woman is not opposed to patriarchal society. On the contrary, this symbol projects, even among the marginalized and oppressed, the desire to obtain a higher social standing within an androcentric community.

The competing interpretations offered by Camp and Heijerman uphold the binary between the Strange Woman and Woman Wisdom. For Camp, the symbol of the Strange Woman represents the worship of foreign goddesses, as opposed to an underlying goddess figure for Israel. Similarly, Heijerman suggests that the Strange Woman desires a shift in her social standing; a position not unlike the

one held by the Wise Woman in ancient Israel. Her "deviant behavior" is "for a limited period only, [wherein] she can afford to do and say things that are normally unacceptable for respectable women."[44] While both Camp and Heijerman critique the patriarchal use of the symbol of the Strange Woman, they do not challenge the underlying binary that gives this symbol its power.

The binary pairing between Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman encourages the application of an intertextual deconstructive framework. One point of comparison is the symbols of "*yin*" and "*yang*" in the *Dao De Jing*:

> [All] things carry *yin* and embrace *yang*.
> They achieve harmony by combining these forces. (DDJ 42.5–6)

Yin and *yang* are "two essential kinds of *qi* (vital energy or life force) that oppose and complement each other."[45] These two symbols in the *Dao De Jing* are often described as the creative forces of femininity and masculinity respectively. Yet the two symbols also require mutual cooperation for sustaining the natural order in the world:

> Under heaven all can see beauty as beauty only because there is ugliness.
> All can know good as good only because there is evil. (2.1–2)

These verses describe how the concepts of "good" and "evil" depend on one another for an accurate description. Similarly, the symbols of *yin* and *yang* rely, at least in part, on the other symbol.[46]

At the same time, the symbols of *yin* and *yang* are interdependent. The next two verses in the *Dao De Jing* illustrate this point:

> Therefore having and not having arise together;
> Difficult and easy complement each other; (2.3–4)

Using the symbols of *yin* and *yang* as a guide, Daoist feminist scholars explain that the description of femininity and masculinity, like any other binary pairing, depend on one another for their meaning. For instance, Lai uses these Daoist symbols to deconstruct the binary of female and male. She claims that, according to this principle, "femininity and masculinity are not mutually exclusive. The presence or existence of one does not imply the nonexistence or absence of the other."[47] Lai makes this point when she states:

> The reciprocity and mutual dependence of one on the other renders the relation between both concepts, as well as the concepts themselves, dynamic. The factors that constitute both concepts are various and constantly subject to change.[48]

The application of the feminist poststructural framework for interpreting the Daoist symbols of *yin* and *yang* in dialog with the book of Proverbs also deconstructs the binary pairing of Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman.[49] Here too, the Daoist concepts of interdependence and mutual cooperation highlight the characteristics of the two ideologically opposed figures. The characteristics shared between the Strange Woman and Woman Wisdom reflect their interconnectedness and challenge a static universalized symbol of a "wise" or "strange" woman. For example, both figures are noted for their elocution (Prov. 5:3; 9:3–4), both call out to people in the streets (7:14–20; 9:5), and both gather listeners to their respective homes for a feast. Thus, the contrast between Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman focuses not on their actions inside and outside the home. Rather, their contrast results from the different interpretation of the same activity. Whereas Woman Wisdom prepares a meal (9:3), the Strange Woman seduces with food (7:13–18). Accordingly, Wisdom symbolizes "all the positive roles played by wives and mothers" in a patriarchal society, whereas the Strange Woman "combines all the male fears of female temptation into one figure."[50] Both characters are thus useful to patriarchy, as the binary presents two types of femininity: one is approved and the other is rejected by the androcentric community. When the figures are recognized as interdependent, however, tension arises due to their similar actions. The difference between them is not clear until the reader attends one of the hypothetical "feasts." This slippage between the features unique to Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman weakens the binary and undermines the power afforded to each symbol.

Deconstructing Femininity in the *Dao De Jing* and Proverbs: A Conclusion

Although Proverbs and the *Dao De Jing* come from completely different historio-cultural contexts and religious frameworks, both texts benefit from a comparative interpretation focusing on the use of symbolic language to depict "femininity." In the *Dao De Jing*, the Dao is repeatedly portrayed as a symbol of ceaseless fertility when the text refers to the Dao as a mother and the mysterious female. Proverbs highlights the Strong Woman, Woman Wisdom, and the Strange Woman as positive and negative representations of femininity. Feminist poststructural scholars find the competing and contradictory depictions of femininity useful, as the *Dao de Jing* and the book of Proverbs develop complex

notions of femininity that challenge essentialized definitions of this concept. For instance, the Daoist symbols of *yin* and *yang*, which bring attention to the interdependency and complementary characteristics of binary pairings, challenge the static symbols of Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman in Proverbs. Read comparatively, *yin* and *yang* stress the similarities and interconnectedness of Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman. *Yin* and *yang* emphasize that each biblical figure relies on the other and that their interdependence undermines the patriarchal interpretation that valorizes one female figure and rejects the other. Another example, taken from Proverbs 31, refers to a mother whose fertility is a secondary characteristic. The Strong Woman in Proverbs highlights the limitations of Daoist reproductive symbols of the mother and the mysterious female. When the biblical Strong Woman is read together with the *Dao De Jing*, the Strong Woman represents the idealized form of femininity, or *wuwei*, usually associated with male rulers in the Daoist tradition. Consequently, the Strong Woman challenges an essentialized view of femininity that reduces women to their reproductive capacity. In sum, a comparative reading of both Proverbs and the *Dao De Jing* produces deconstructive meanings in both ways.

An intertextual poststructural analysis of biblical narratives challenges the normative presentation of femininity, deconstructs the categories of masculine and feminine, and critiques the problem of identifying femininity exclusively with reproductive capacity. This essay offers one example of this type of scholarship, focusing on the interaction between Proverbs and the *Dao De Jing* on the topic of femininity. The wide variety of texts and traditions suggest that numerous topics remain available for intertextual deconstructive analysis. For example, scholars focusing on the description of femininity in the creation narratives in Genesis may find an interesting conversation partner in the Chinese creation myth of Nu Kua.[51] Additionally, this type of intertextual analysis does not have to exclusively focus on the topic of femininity. For instance, an intertextual deconstructive reading of David in the books of Samuel and the presentation of submissive manliness in Daoist literature challenges the normative portrayal of masculinity. These subjects, and many others, create points of contact for deconstructing stable gender categories in religious texts and traditions. This deconstructive intertextual analysis is thus another tool for both feminist and gender-oriented scholars.

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[1] Esther Fuchs, *Feminist Theory and the Bible: Interrogating the Sources* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), 67.

[2] Danna N. Fewell, "Introduction," in *Reading between Texts: Intertextuality in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Danna N. Fewell (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 23.

[3] Judith Chuan Xu, "Poststructuralist Feminism and the Problem of Femininity in the Daodejing," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 19 (2003): 47.

[4] This includes chapters 1, 20, 52, and 59.

[5] Quotations from the *Dao De Jing* are taken from *Dao De Jing* (trans. Gia-fu Feng, Jane English, and Toinette Lippe; New York, NY: second Vintage Books ed., 2012).

[6] Yueh-Ting Lee, "Daoistic Humanism in Ancient China: Broadening Personality and Counseling Theories in the 21st Century," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 43 (2003): 72.

[7] See, e.g., Vimala McClure, *Tao of Motherhood* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 1997), 32–34; Max Kaltenmark, *Lao Tzu and Taoism* (trans. Roger Greaves; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1969), esp. section on "primacy of the Feminine" beginning on p. 58; Kyoo Lee, "On the Transformative Potential of the 'Dark Female Animal,'" in *Asian and Feminist Philosophies in Dialogue: Liberating Traditions*, ed. Jennifer McWeeny and Ashby Butnor (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2014); Robin Wang, *Images of Women in Chinese Thought and Culture: Writings from the Pre-Qin Period through the Song Dynasty* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 2003), 67–72.

[8] Lee, "Daoistic Humanism," 73. See also Lijuan Shen and Paul D'Ambrosio, "Gender in Chinese Philosophy," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP)*, http://www.iep.utm.edu/gender-c/ [accessed on July 20, 2017]: "Laozi clearly promotes nominally feminine characteristics and values … . While this does not necessarily equate the Laozi with what is now called 'feminism' it does provide Chinese culture with a potential resource for reviving or creating conceptions of femininity in a more positive light." This interpretation can be contrasted with feminist Daoist scholarship: "Laozi was no 'feminist' and was not concerned about gender issues"; see Xu, "Poststructuralist Feminism," 62.

[9] For a comparison in feminist biblical scholarship, see Susan Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel* (New York, NY / London: Doubleday, 1998), esp. 129–62. For an example of the mythologizing approach in Proverbs, see Claudia V. Camp, "Woman Wisdom," in *Women*

in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament, ed. Carol Meyers, Toni Craven, and Ross S. Kraemer (Boston, MA / New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 549–50.

[10] Ellen Marie Chen, "Tao as the Great Mother and the Influence of Motherly Love in the Shaping of Chinese Philosophy," *History of Religions* 14 (1974): 53, 54.

[11] Ibid., 53.

[12] Ibid.

[13] See, e.g., ibid., 52. Chen states there: "The [*Dao De Jing*] first appealed to me as a work on naturalism and primitivism: nature is sacred, good, and harmonious, but human consciousness and its workings destroy the peace and organic unity of nature." Chen refers to "Mother Nature" on pages 57, 60, and 61.

[14] Ibid., 52.

[15] Ibid., 53.

[16] Xu, "Poststructuralist Feminism," 49.

[17] Karyn Lai, "The Daodejing: Resources for Contemporary Feminist Thinking," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 27 (2000): 140.

[18] Xu, "Poststructuralist Feminism," 47.

[19] Ibid., 50.

[20] Ibid., 53.

[21] Katrin Froese, *Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Daoist Thought: Crossing Paths In-Between* (New York, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006), 210.

[22] As Xu claims: "whereas the male principle plays a leading role in the Yijing's cosmology, the DDJ exalts the female … . The mother, the female animal, and the female reproductive organs emerge as the dominant symbols of the Dao"; see Xu, "Poststructuralist Feminism," 52.

[23] Ibid., 55.

[24] Ibid., 62.

[25] Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *Just Wives? Stories of Power & Survival in the Old Testament and Today* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 123. See also Christine Roy Yoder, "Proverbs," in *The Women's Bible Commentary: Twentieth-Anniversary Edition Revised and Updated*, ed. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 241.

[26] Sakenfeld, *Just Wives*, 123.

[27] Ibid., 120.

[28] Carole Fontaine, *Smooth Words: Women, Proverbs, and Performance in Biblical Wisdom* (New York, NY: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 29.

[29] See, e.g., Joseph Hsu, *Daodejing: A Literal-Critical Translation*; David Hinton, *Tao Te Ching* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 2000); Ursula K. Le Guin, *Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching* (Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, 1997).

[30] Burton Watson, *Zhuangzi: Basic Writings* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2003), 46.

[31] Ibid., 47.

[32] Froese, *Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Daoist Thought*, 215.

[33] Carole R. Fontaine, "Proverbs," in *The Women's Bible Commentary: Expanded Edition*, ed. Carol A.

Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 160.

[34] Yoder, “Proverbs,” 242.

[35] Or “created”; see, e.g., Kathleen A. Farmer’s translation of *qanani* in Kathleen A. Farmer, *Proverbs & Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 53–54.

[36] Camp, “Woman Wisdom,” 549–50. Camp also notes recognizes historical parallels between Wisdom and “the Egyptian Isis, the Sumerian Inanna, and the (related) Babylonian Ishtar/Canaanite Astarte”; see ibid. 550. See also Jekheli Kibami Singh, *Dame Wisdom and Dame Folly: Portrayal of Women in the Book of Proverbs* (Delhi: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2005), 5–43. This mythologizing approach tentatively overlaps with Chen’s work that compares mother images of the Dao and goddess imagery in Chinese philosophy; see Chen, “Tao as the Great Mother,” 52.

[37] Judith E. McKinlay, *Gendering Wisdom the Host: Biblical Invitations to Eat and Drink* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 36. It is worth noting that McKinlay rejects R. B. Y. Scott’s use of the term “mythological” to describe the worship of Asherah. McKinlay draws a distinction between myth and convergence, but her interpretation still focuses on the changing worship of Asherah in ancient Israel; see R. B. Y. Scott, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965).

[38] The exception to this rule is, of course, the example of the Strong Woman of Proverbs 31.

[39] Claudia V. Camp, *Wisdom and Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Sheffield: Almond, 1985), 268. On the latter possibility, Camp suggests that the interpretation of the Strange Woman builds on the commands against intermarriage in Ezra and Nehemiah: “Whatever the possible meanings of [the Strange Woman], it is hard to disassociate it completely from Ezra 10.2–11 (cf. especially Ezra 10.8 with Prov. 5.14). Association with foreign women in both cases puts the individual in danger … . Why? Because the *qahal* itself is threatened by any sexual arrangement deviant from the community-sustaining Israelite family”; see ibid., 269.

[40] Claudia V. Camp, *Wise, Strange and Holy: The Strange Woman and the Making of the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 61.

[41] Meike Heijerman, “Who Would Blame Her? The ‘Strange’ Woman of Proverbs 7,” in *A Feminist Companion to Wisdom Literature*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 103.

[42] Ibid., 106.

[43] Ibid., 107.

[44] Ibid., 108. Heijerman even suggests that the Strange Woman represents the mother’s projection “of her own wish to be as independent and powerful as the ‘strange’ woman”; see ibid.

[45] Keping Wang, *Reading the Dao: A Thematic Inquiry* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2011), 22.

[46] Or as Chad Hansen puts it: “Opposite terms are born together. To have or learn one is to have or learn the other. You cannot have mastered *water* unless you also know what is *not water*”; see Chad Hansen, *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought: A Philosophical Interpretation* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992), 211.

[47] Lai, “The Daodejing,” 148. The use of *yin* and *yang* to deconstruct this binary system has also been used by queer theorists such as Susan Scheibler: “Men are not pure *yang*; women are not pure *yin*; therefore, sex between men is not a matter of *yang* on *yang* and sex between women is not a matter of *yin* on *yin*. Any relationship … depends on the interdependence, interaction, mutual inclusion, growth and transformation, and reversal of *yin* and *yang*.” See Susan Scheibler, “Daoism and the LGBT Community,” in *The Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Chinese Philosophy and Gender*, ed. Ann A. Pang-White (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

[48] Lai, “The Daodejing,” 148.

[49] Carole Fontaine recognizes this possibility in her comparison between Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman: “[A]pparently there were no mediocre mothers or adulteresses”; see Fontaine, *Smooth Words*, 149.

[50] Ibid., 154.

[51] See, e.g., Archie C. C. Lee, “The Chinese Creation Myth of Nu Kua and the Biblical Narrative in Genesis 1–11,” *Biblical Interpretation* 2.3 (1994): 312–34.

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